The Mystics of Siena

Misciattelli

THE MYSTICS OF SIENA

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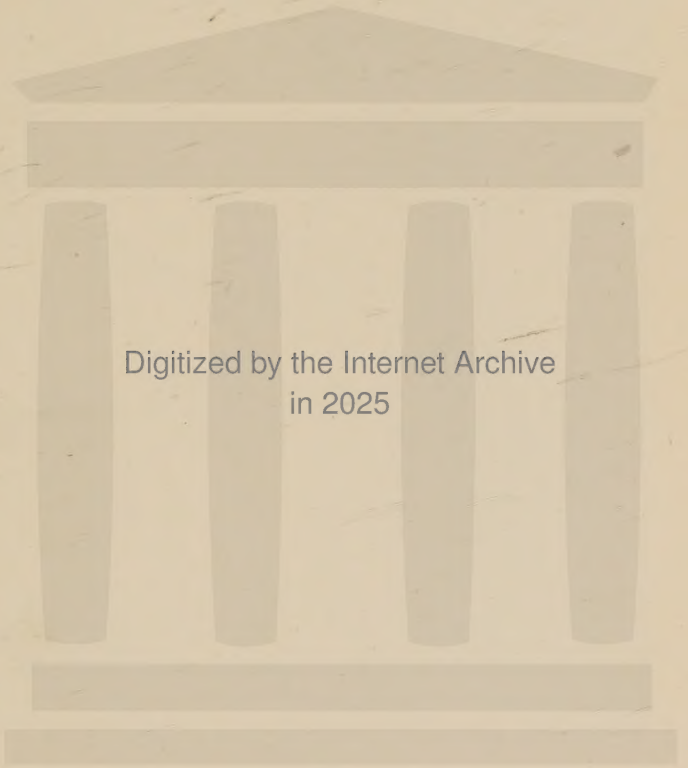
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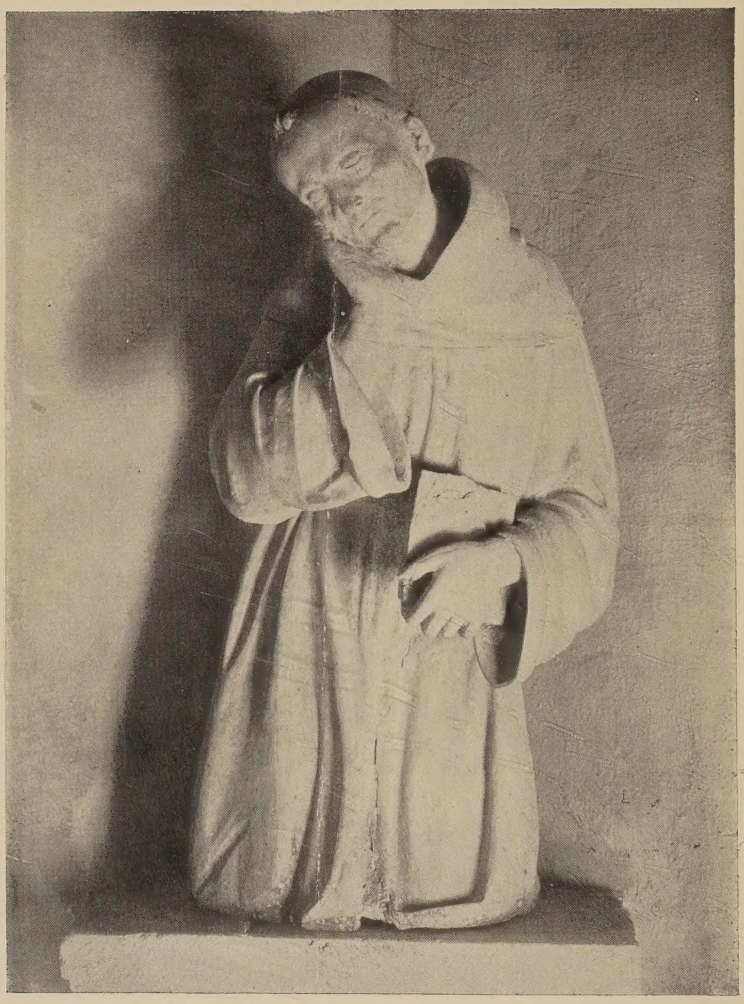

BUST OF SAN BERNARDINO IN THE MONASTERY OF THE OSSERVAZA SIENA.
Lombardi.

THE MYSTICS OF SIENA

BY

PIERO MISCIATTELLI

Author of "Savonarola" etc.

ENGLISH VERSION BY

M. PETERS-ROBERTS

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Foreword

This book on the mystical life of Siena has been faithfully translated, and will, I trust, meet with the favour of those English-speaking readers who are able to appreciate so profoundly not only the artistic works of the early Italians, but the human and religious idealism by which the earlier artists were inspired, and who are interested to know something of the historic surroundings in which they lived.

In no other Italian city during the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries was Art so closely bound to life as it was in Siena. Sienese artists were verily the most faithful interpreters of the sentiments and ideas of their great mystics. In this little Tuscan city Art never bent itself in order to magnify or satisfy the private ambitions of the cardinals or powerful nobles, but remained constantly at the service of a religious and civil ideal which was strongly felt by all the people.

This fact explains the peculiar character of the Sienese School—saturated with the mediæval spirit even during the height of the Renaissance, so that one might say that it is the last expression, and perhaps the clearest and most suggestive, of mediæval Christianity.

The museums and private collections of both England and America have the good fortune to possess many among the most beautiful and significant works of the ancient Sienese School, works which have been studied and marvellously illustrated by well-known critics like Mr. Bernard Berenson and Mr. F. Mason Perkins.

4 1963

Through a more intimate knowledge of the spiritual activity of the Sienese Mystics, lovers of those primitive painters and sculptors of the Sienese School may perhaps gather more light, so as to enjoy better and also to understand more fully their works, and this book may not, therefore, be unacceptable to them.

Piero Misciattelli.

Siena.

Introduction

I well remember the twilight hours of that sultry autumnal day when I felt impelled as if by a command of my soul to bring to life, in a book, the spirit of those great Sienese Mystics who have throughout the centuries been a source of inspiration to poets, painters, and preachers. I was driving through the Val d'Orcia, where those great souls had once dwelt, and the emotions that I experienced, the places that I visited, the legends that I heard, and the history of the various villages through which I passed, made me enter deeply into the lyric and religious sentiments of those men and women who have given to us that strange mediæval mysticism which is peculiarly Sienese, and which the painting and sculpture of Siena express, making it quite different from every other School of Art.

I had spent the previous night at the Castle of Ripa with my friend, Piero Piccolomini, a young man whose lofty aspirations and high ideals gave promise of a useful future, had death not snatched him from us in the flower of his youth.

Before leaving the Castle my friend had afforded me the extreme felicity of hearing the organ of the little country church breathe forth a fervent prayer in the beautiful *Communion* of Benedetto Marcello. On our way we had stopped at the Monastery of Monteoliveto, to re-visit the Frescoes of Sodoma, and the charm of

THE MARRIAGE OF ST. FRANCIS AND THE MAIDEN POVERTY
Sassetta

CHANTILLY COLLECTION

In these lines is revealed the essence of Sienese mysticism, flourishing amid the fierce hatred of adverse factions and under the burden of a deadly pestilence.

The Val d'Orcia is truly a place well adapted to the growth of heroic sentiments, strewn as it is with grim castles, and deprived of natural charms. It was perhaps for this reason that the sweet maiden Poverty chose it above every other place, to offer herself as a spouse to St. Francis. Sassetta beautifully depicts the legend in his well-known picture in the Chalandon Collection (Chantilly). The Saint, in the last year of his life, was walking from Rieto to Siena, when, one day, about sunset, there suddenly appeared to him in a desert place between Campiglia and St. Quirico d'Orcia three maidens —Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience. The first, who was barefooted, was clad in a poor coarse garment, the second in a white tunic, and the third in a blood-red robe. The Saint recognised at once his well-beloved Poverty, to whom he was espoused in a union of Faith.

In the picture[1] we see the three maidens returning to Heaven, and, when disappearing over Monte Amiata, Poverty turned her head to gaze at St. Francis, as if sending to him a sweet parting smile of gratitude.

The scene of this idyllic picture of peace has often been invaded by warriors, eager for massacre and rapine. St. Quirico has seen under its walls the men of Barbarossa, hordes of English adventurers, troops of Florentine bandits, and Albanian, French and Spanish soldiery. It was in the Val d'Orcia that they discussed the fate of that liberty which was oppressed by the Emperor Charles V; and it was at Montalcino that the surviving Sienese heroically defended the last Republican flag, refusing to bow their heads before the foreigner, even when resistance seemed sheer madness.

[1] See Illustration.

The Sienese, particularly those of this valley, were as sublime in patriotic as they were in religious mysticism. They faced with undaunted hearts death, ruin, and utter devastation. The smallest castle did not escape, and the imperial troops besieged what seemed to be the most insignificant places, for, as the ancient chroniclers wrote: "The people minded not being killed, as each desired to die for the State of Siena," and "the trees seemed to yield dead men."

Sienese Mysticism was not a neurotic manifestation of weak and sentimental minds; but a crimson flower from the best Italian blood, marking out those men and women; endowing them with the virtue of action and joy of spirit, which the art of the time embodied in the most marvellous forms.

As I sped along that evening, my friend at my side, and only the hooting of the car to disturb the silence, I seemed to feel this Roman road palpitating like a living artery, while it twisted in and out to connect the mother city—"The Eternal City," with her glorious daughter, Siena. Along this road had gone to Montalcino those Sienese who had survived the last siege—wounded, starved, but still undaunted, and still obstinately refusing to bow their heads to the stranger. Worthily indeed may it be called the "Via Sacra," if the blood of those martyred for the liberty and ideals of that day succeeds in rousing once more the spirit of the modern pilgrims of Italy to a height of devotion, patriotism and virtue. The country around seemed to exhale the sadness of stifled passions and contrite humiliated hearts, but there could also be heard now and again the echoes of heroic and triumphant songs of victory.

All the way from the distant Castle of Amiata up to the gates of Siena these spectres of Pity and Death had

accompanied us. We could see Buonconvento, where, on August 24th, 1331, the exiled poet, King Henry of Luxemburg, Dante's hero of the *Monarchia*, had died; then we passed the hill of Malamerenda, with its four thin cypress trees writhing in the wind like damned souls, reminding us of that feast of peace to which the families Tolomei and Salimbeni had been invited, and which had ended in wholesale massacre. Not far from the Roman Gate we had passed the terribly sad and pathetic "Stations" of those condemned to death; the "Albergaccio," where the wretched prisoners spent their last night, the "Coroncina" where was intoned the rosary for the dying and the "Poggio alle Forche" (The Hill of the Gallows) where they were hanged. On arriving here I was reminded of St. Catherine and the deep sweetness of that womanly love, so beautifully expressed by Sodoma in his picture in the chapel of S. Domenico. The Saint is seen kneeling, rapt in ecstacy, while gazing at the heavenward flight of the soul of the man whose body lies at her feet. On her face is reflected his deathly pallor, but in her eyes there burns a brilliant light of faith, as she says the words of comfort to the poor victim: "Hie thee upward to the marriage feast, sweet brother mine, soon thou wilt enter into life everlasting."

The death-wind I had felt in the air during my journey, while sitting near that friend whom I was to lose so very soon, made me feel how little worth is our frail ephemeral existence when compared with great and lofty ideals which live for ever; and I longed to bring back to life some of those dead saints and heroes, whose influence we feel as a spring of energy, faith and hope.

On arriving in Siena, and as I left the car, I turned to

my friend and told him why I had decided to write this book. He immediately entered into my feelings, and his face shone with gladness. It was the last smile I saw on the face of my dear friend, Piero Piccolomini, to whose memory I dedicate these lines.

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THE CAMPO WITH THE CORTEGE OF THE DIFFERENT CONTRADE,
17TH CENTURY.

Part I.

CHAPTER I

Siena Vetus Civitas Virginis

SIENA, one of the loveliest of the Tuscan cities, reminds us of the legendary Princess in the Enchanted Castle, sleeping calmly while the centuries rolled onward, keeping her beauty and charm untouched and unspoiled.

Most of her sister cities have yielded themselves to the customs of modern life—but not Siena. She, the "Home of Souls," rests proudly on her three historic hills, living in the past, and dreaming of the glorious days of long ago.

Many of the fanciful creations of her youth survive, so that her structural form is practically what it was in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Here is the Duomo, here the Baptistery, here the Hospital (the first home of Sienese Mysticism), the temples of S. Francesco and S. Domenico, the Palazzo Pubblico, the hundred oratories, the austere palaces, the quaint fountains, the columns crowned by the Wolf—the piazze, and the narrow streets (costarelle) and the arches of the Republican Period—all unchanged! And indeed the feelings of the inhabitants seem also unchanged, for every year during the Feasts of the "Palio" the whole city is thrilled with excitement; ancient passions are awakened at the unfurling of the banners of the Contrade;[1] and the emotion of the populace at the appearing in the Campo of the war chariot—the Carroccio—sweeps us back to the Middle Ages. All is unchanged. We can still hear from the

[1] See Illustration.

Tower the sound of the big bell which bears the name of the "Vergine Assunta," and during the "Palio," or any sad or joyous great national occasion, the big bell of the Tower gives forth its deep sound *and speaks*. It is the voice of the Siena of history. It rings out, measured and even, its long-drawn notes through a scale of low sonorous, full vibrations, whose echo reaches even to the far-distant countryside. In that voice is the sadness of a dream of vanished greatness merging into a sigh of prayer; it is a vague regret for the passing of that devotion to the Ancient Faith that once swayed the city; sometimes it seems to be a note of presentiment, as if the bell feared the destruction of all the old ideals and said: "How long will all this endure?"

And perhaps the day is not far distant when the mediæval city, which was strong enough to resist the Renaissance, will have to bow before the violence and stress of modern life, new customs, new ideals! . . . But may not this be all the more reason why we should try to catch and understand some of the spirit of this mystic princess, and weave it into the affairs of our everyday life, making them less prosaic, less material, so that something may still remain with us of that glorious past, should the warning note of the great bell be indeed the death knell of the old Siena.

CHAPTER II

Siena Vetus Civitas Virginis

HISTORY, legend, art and poetry have all contributed to describe the origin and progress of the Sienese Commune, which, having been recognised as independent by the Emperor Henry VI in 1186, became so prosperous and powerful, that in the thirteenth century, at the height of its glory, it elected its own democratic form of government, which was called "The Government of the Nine" (Governo dei Nove).

The commercial dealings which Siena had with France, England, Flanders and the East had resulted in the amassing of enormous wealth, and men who had reached the age of twenty-five who belonged to the good merchant classes (bonorum mercatorum) were alone eligible for membership in the Government, these being regarded as the "builders" of the Commune.

This democratic victory was of immense help to the Guilds of Arts and Crafts, which enjoyed special privileges and ample protection. Not only were they allowed their own Courts to decide controversies, but they could also send representatives to the Councils of the Consuls, to discuss all matters of commerce and finance.

The meetings of parliament were at first held in the Campo or big Piazza, later on in the Church of S. Cristofano, and towards the end of the thirteenth century in the Palazzo Pubblico. The General Council was composed of 300 members.

The young Commune was divided into different sections, under different names, and perfect order existed

in each section. Pride of citizenship was encouraged, and political satire was looked upon as a grave misdemeanour, often leading to disorders. A special register called "Memoriale delle Offese" was kept, in which any wrong or injury done by the riotous young members of the nobility or middle classes was recorded. A law, called the "Law of Retaliation" often caused ill-feeling in the city. It was a disciplinary law and a relic of barbarism. When an individual was offended, his whole family and also his friends, took up his quarrel, as if in hierarchical order, so that sometimes the Consorteria, the Compagnia, the Contrada, the Terzo and the Città were all involved in the vendetta! Each family and each part of the city was alive to its own dignity, symbolised by a special emblem, and it is recorded that in 1264 a certain unfortunate Ventura Gualtieri was condemned to pay a fine of twenty-five lire for having dared to paint on a standard the figure of a wolf (emblem of the Commune), whose nose had been mauled by a lion, emblem of the People, to which Gualtieri belonged. This insult might have led to such grave disorders that the Captain of the "People" was obliged to punish the daring young man. In fact, every idea, every faith, was regarded by the majority of the Sienese with such an intensity of feeling that it was dangerous to act or even speak lightly of certain things.

This spirit of "vendetta" in the primitive Sienese while stifling to a great extent their religious sentiments, strengthened and encouraged their sense of patriotism. Their passionate love of country cannot be better realised than in their behaviour when they received an insulting message from their rival and much-hated neighbours, the Florentines. War was being continually waged between the Ghibellines—favoured by Siena—and the Guelphs,

of Florence, and the climax was reached when in 1260, a decisive battle was fought at Monteaperto. On one memorable day in September, 1260, the Florentines sent two emissaries to Siena with this arrogant message: "We require the walls to be opened in more places, so that when we desire to enter we can do so at our pleasure. Besides this, we wish to place in every 'Terzo' of Siena, a Governor, and in Camporeggi we wish to make a strong fortress for the safety and security of our Governor of Florence."

The Sienese sent back this curt reply: "Return home and tell your people that they will receive their answer by word of mouth on the field of battle."

Having sent this reply the Council met together in the Church of S. Cristofano to discuss the situation, Buonaguida Lucari being elected President. During the discussion it was found that the chest of the Commune did not contain the hundred thousand gold florins which were considered necessary for war expenses. On hearing this one of the merchants, Salimbene Salimbeni, rose up suddenly, saying: "*There is money*, and it will be ready at once." He left the assembly without saying another word, and within a short time a handsome carriage, festooned and decorated as if for a feast, drove up to the church. It was Salimbeni's carriage conveying the money: a magnificent gift of patriotism.

The President then addressing the people said: "Now it seems to us that we ought to offer ourselves, our goods, the city, the country, with all our interests to the Virgin Mary." Thereupon, bareheaded, barefooted, a leather halter around his neck, with the keys of Siena in his hands, he walked to the Duomo, followed by the people. On the threshold of the Church he was met by the Bishop. The people, forgetting personal injuries, then made peace

one with another—because of the great love they had for their city. Buonaguida, kneeling before the image of the Virgin, made this vow, and this prayer: "Oh, most pitiful Mary, oh counsellor and help of the afflicted, help us; and I give and present to thee the City of Siena, with all its inhabitants, the country and all our interests. Behold! here I consign to thee the keys; take care of thy city, and guard her from all wicked works; and above all from the Florentine tyranny. Deign, merciful Mother, to accept this small gift of our goodwill." . . . Then, turning to the Notary he said: "And thou, Notary, draw up a deed of this donation, that it may endure for ever."

The following morning at daybreak an order was issued that "every man should arm himself in the Name of God and of the Virgin Mary, and present himself to his superior officer." Then the army marched out by the Porta S. Viene to do battle against the enemy, the men of the Terzo of S. Martino being dressed in red, those of Camullia in white, and those of the Città in green. They were followed by the German horsemen of Count Giordano, and the Sienese horseman, among whom was Provenzano Salvani, who so distinguished himself in the battle. Last to come on the field was the famous war-chariot, the Carroccio, over which floated the white standard—which, the chroniclers say, "gave all present great comfort, for the white standard seemed to them like the mantle of the Virgin Mary."

. . . . . .

The Carroccio, or war chariot, was a car upon four wheels, drawn by four pairs of oxen covered with rich cloths. From the centre rose a horn or "antenna," and upon it floated the standard of the Republic with the

VIEW OF SIENA, 1300. AMBROGIO LORENZETTI, COMMUNAL PALACE.

device of a golden lion, which, as Tommasi says, was "non rampante, ma camminante" (not rampant, but marching forward) for the Sienese were never known to flee. About the middle of the antenna was a figure of Christ on the Cross, with the arms outspread as if blessing the army. In front of the car there was a platform where valiant soldiers stood to defend the chariot, and at the back another platform, where stood the trumpeters and musicians.

Before the Carroccio was taken on to the battlefield surrounded by white-robed priests, a service of consecration and religious worship was held, while crowds of people looked on with awe and pride. The capture or loss of the Carroccio was regarded as a public calamity, so the very pick of the army, the bravest soldiers, were told off to guard and protect it, and the fiercest strife was waged close to it, as its presence often decided the gain or loss of the day. The battle was fought fiercely on both sides, and as the Greeks and Trojans of old called on their gods for help, so now both Sienese and Florentines implored aid of their Christians saints, S. Giorgio and S. Zenobi. The Sienese were not long in overcoming the Florentines, who showed signs of yielding, and were pursued by their enemies as far as the road which lies between Santa Maria a Dofano and Arbia. Here the Florentine Carroccio, which had been brought into the field to make a brave show, was captured; and Messer Tornaquinci and his three sons died defending it. The chronicler Ventura describing the carnage of that day says: "The Sienese fought like chained lions, dashing in and out amongst horses and men to attack their enemies, who looked like wounded swine, and it availed them nothing to call on their patron saints, S. Zenobi and S. Riparata, because on that day the Sienese made a

greater slaughter of their enemies than did the butchers of their beasts on Good Friday."

The next Sunday, a little after Tierce, the Sienese triumphantly returned to their city, entering by the Gate of S. Viene. Ventura describes the entry in these words: "Heading the procession of the victors was one of the two emissaries who had brought the insolent message from Florence—and who had survived the carnage of that day. He was seated on an ass; his hands tied behind his back, his face turned towards the tail of the ass, and he trailed along the ground the standard of the Commune of Florence. . . . Then followed the triumphal army which marched amidst the shouts and acclamations of old men, women and children; with the Carroccio, over which floated the white standard, together with the banners of the "Terzi," red, white and green, forming the three-coloured Italian national flag."

A breach was made in the wall to allow the Carroccio to enter without lowering the victorious standard of the Commune, while the Florentine chariot was taken to the Campo, smashed to pieces, and burnt amidst the furious shouts of the populace. Having done this, they all went in a body to the Cathedral to fulfil the vow they had made to the Virgin, to whom they promised these further honours:—

The Sienese money which bore the inscription *Sena Vetus* was to bear in addition, the words *Civitas Virginis*;

Every citizen at the age of sixteen was to present to the Cathedral on the Eve of the Feast of the Assumption a pound of candles decorated and ornamented;

Day and night a lamp in honour of the Virgin was to be kept burning before the Carroccio;

Two churches were to be erected. One, in honour of

S. Giorgio, was to have in its Campanile as many openings as there were banners taken from the Florentines; the other was to be built on the spot where the Florentine Carroccio was captured.

All these honours were conferred on Siena in order to record that victory which the Florentine historian Villari has so concisely commented upon in one terribly sad phrase: "Then was broken and annihilated the ancient People of Florence."

CHAPTER III

Sienese Culture

THE City of Siena which Dante Alighieri visited forty-two years after the battle of Monteaperto was above everything a city of culture. He reached it in his wanderings from Rome, when his heart was embittered and sad; and found that it was a place where not riches alone counted, but where there was above all a great thirst and ambition for knowledge.

Siena had always been as eager for knowledge as she had been a lover of beauty and heroic virtues, even during her centuries of greatest splendour. This is exemplified in the "Statute of the Sienese Artists" of the thirteenth century, which concludes with this declaration:

Neuna cosa, quanto sia minima può aver cominciamento o fine, senza queste tre cose: senza potere et senza sapere, et senza con amore volere. (Nothing, be it ever so small, can have beginning or ending, unless possessing these three things—ability, knowledge, and earnest desire.)

The Commune was very proud and most jealous of its flourishing University. In the thirteenth century it could boast of twenty-two professors. The chief subjects taught were Theology, Physics, Medicine, Law and Philosophy.

The school of Medicine was very celebrated, and one of the students (who was probably also a teacher), a certain Master Aldobrandino, left valuable manuscripts which were only discovered a few years ago by Landouzy

VIEW OF THE CITY OF SIENA, 14TH CENTURY.
BIG CANNON FIRST USED.
PICTURE BY PIETRO LORENZETTI, GALLERY OF BELLE ARTI, SIENA.

and Pepin in the Arsenal Library of Paris. One of these, *Le Regime du Corps*,[1] is the first treatise dealing with Hygiene to be published in French, and was originally written in 1236. The French employed is that of Picardy, which was that spoken by the Sienese merchants who traded with Flanders, Provence and Champagne.

. . . The University also possessed a Chair of Astrology, the professor being Guido Bonatti, whom Dante places in the Fourth Region of Hell. In those days even cultured people believed in the science of Astrology, and in the "Books of Biccherna" certain sums were entered as having been paid by the Commune to Bonatti and the Astrologers for "services rendered." Many were drawn into grave heresy through this belief, men like Cecco d'Ascoli, who was burnt in 1327, and Griffolino and Capocchio, both of whom suffered death, one for sorcery and the other as a dangerous alchemist.

It was the Arabian astrologer, Albumazar, who affirmed for the first time that the origin of all religions and the birth of prophets depended on certain planetary conjunctions. He said that the union of Jove with Saturn had given rise to the religion of Israel; that of Jove with Mars to the Chaldean religion; with the Sun to the Egyptian; with Venus to the Mahommedan; with Mercury to the Christian; and that the conjunction of Jove with the Moon would be a sign of the end of every religion on the earth. Petrarch showed a belief in the influence of the stars, judging from one of his lines of poetry when he says that each man's future is fixed from the day of his birth.

"Sua ventura ha ciascun dal di' che nasce."

[1] *Le Regime du Corps de Maitre Aldobrandin de Sienne*, par les Docteurs Louis Landouzy et Roger Pépin. Paris, Champion ed., 1911.

The cultured astrological science of that day was often confounded with a belief in quack doctors and in superstitious medical remedies.

Many of the Catholics accepted some parts of the teachings of the astrologers and rejected others, but it was not until the discoveries of Newton and Galileo that a belief in the influence of the stars was really killed.

CHAPTER IV

Sienese Culture

AT the beginning of the thirteenth century the City of Siena was divided into three parts (Terzi) its principal streets being Via Galgaria, Via del Casato and Via del Travaglio, which were paved with bricks. On the walls of the houses in these populous streets there could often be seen inscriptions and drawings relating to the every-day life of the City, and those men who were guilty of not keeping faith would have their effigies painted upside down upon the walls. The streets were never wider than twelve yards, and along each side stood high turreted houses, stern, severe-looking, into which the light filtered through windows covered with sheep-skin, made transparent with linseed oil. At each end of the street were placed small pillars with chains, which could be drawn across in times of tumult, to prevent the nobles making incursions on horseback into the populous quarters. In the highest part of the city were found points of strategic importance like those of Porrione, Salicotto, Spallaforte, Rialto, Cartagine and Castelvecchio.

Isolated and disdainful of the populace arose the "Castellari" of the patrician families, many of whom had not entered into the ideas of the times, and so kept themselves aloof. But there were also some of the nobles who were imbued with pure democratic sentiments, and others shrewd enough to hide their real feelings; while a few,—amongst them Provenzano Salvani,—even went so far as to place themselves at the head of the popular movements.

Down in the lower parts of the city, in the valleys, murmured the lovely fountains under pointed arches, ornamented with seats, reliefs, and inscriptions—fountains such as Ovile; Follonica; and Fontebranda. The Piazza, the ancient Forum of the Roman Siena was the object of scrupulous care on the part of the Commune; in fact a set of rules was drawn up indicating precisely in what way it could be employed. The Palio was not run in the thirteenth century, but another game, called "Elmora," a most cruel and dangerous pastime, was much favoured by the Sienese. It is recorded that in 1291 the people of the Terzo of Camullia with those of S. Martino went into the Piazza to do battle with the people of the "Città" according to the rules of "Elmora." Both sides carried lances and stones, and as the mock fight proceeded, the men became so excited that ten of them were killed and several wounded.

After this the Commune prohibited the use of the lance and stone, allowing the combatants to use nothing but their fists.

The Piazza was in 1276 the scene of a very beautiful and artistic representation. Siena had been placed under an Interdict, because she had espoused the cause of the Emperor as against the Pope. This condition had lasted for ten years, when the "Blessed" Ambrogio Sansedoni[1] undertook to go to Rome and intercede with Gregory IX to withdraw the Interdict, and pardon the city. His embassy was successful, and when the people

[1] Ambrogio Sansedoni, who belonged to a noble Sienese family, was born in 1220. Seventeen years later, on his birthday, he became a Dominican. He asked to be allowed to go to Paris to receive instruction under the famous Alberto Magno. Having lived several years in Paris, he next went to Cologne for some time, but was recalled to Rome by Innocent IX, in order to teach theology. He refused a bishopric offered him by Gregory IX. He preached the Crusades. He was a simple austere man, a typical representative of the Sienese nobility of the twelfth century; rich, intelligent and shrewd. He died in 1286, and the Commune erected for him a marble tomb in a chapel of S. Domenico; both tomb and chapel were destroyed at the same time as the roof of the church.

heard the good news so great was their joy that they decided to celebrate it in a worthy manner by holding a special "Festa" in the Piazza. A huge tent was erected in the centre, and decorated at the top with an enormous flower in bud. Surrounding the tent were groves of thick bushes, concealing dark caverns with closed doors, invisible to the spectators.

When everybody was assembled, the opening of the Festa was signalled by the flight of a white dove, emblematic of peace. The dove was propelled along a wire which stretched slantwise from the balcony of the Palazzo to a point above the tent, where it fell with its beak aflame on to the bud, which, opening suddenly released a quantity of bright rays, and revealed the interior of the tent in the form of a theatre, showing the richly furnished room of the Pope who, seated on his throne and surrounded by a splendid Court of Cardinals, Princes, and Ambassadors, was listening benignly to Brother Ambrogio. The Pope's reply was heard, graciously withdrawing the Interdict, and to show the gratitude of the people there entered at that moment into the Piazza a decorated cart, bearing choirs of children dressed as angels, intoning hymns of praise in honour of the Virgin Queen of the city, and also of Brother Ambrogio, who was himself present. The next scene represented an Archangel, who seated on a very splendid cloud began to knock furiously on the doors of the hidden caverns, out of which rushed devils and wizards, hissing and groaning, giving themselves over to one of those fantastic "Diableries" so common in the sacred mysteries of France, which the Sienese merchants must often have witnessed during their travels.

Having discomfited this Satanic host, the spectacle ended in hymns of praise sung by a choir of angels.

CHAPTER V.

Sienese Culture—The Piazza

THE Piazza or Campo was, during the thirteenth century one of the most picturesque places in Siena. The Palazzo had risen up suddenly in its beauty, and all around were the tents and shops of the various traders, the barbers, cobblers, apothecaries, doublet-makers, and also shops where the Sienese ladies roamed, buying silks of France, silver wreaths, little skirts, fringes for their heavy petticoats and exquisitely-worked jewellery. Probably there was the shop of Maestro Pace di Valentino who started the first watchmaking school in Italy. He was employed by the Commune to decorate the "Carroccio" after the victory of Monteaperto, and had four partners in his business of watchmaker and goldsmith. His shop was frequently visited by the aristocratic ladies and rich middle classes: for the women of the day possessed a great quantity of jewellery. One of them, the wife of Griffolino Ildebrandini, has left us a note of her jewels (dated 1272) and amongst many rings and clasps we find her "Atrecciatoio" or hair net, which was of "vermilion coloured silk embroidered with pearls, in designs of eagles, lions and stags intertwined in a mesh all stitched in gold."

These ladies must have caused much envy among the poor hawkers, breadsellers, onion sellers and other traders who crowded the Piazza with their trestles and hand carts at market time.

During the busiest hours, when the crowd was densest, there occasionally appeared a man on horseback, dressed in red, with a cone-shaped hat. This was the public

crier of the Commune, who first blew a trumpet to call the attention of the people, and then cried out his news. The people hustled one another to get near enough to hear what he had to tell them. Sometimes it would be the latest resolutions passed by the Council; the sentence of banishment on an illustrious citizen; punishment by fire or by the loss of a hand on a false coiner; the beheading of an assassin.

There had also reached the city echoes of the sad story of Pia dei Tolomei and the proud haughty deeds of Ghino di Tacco. Pia dei Tolomei was a high born lady who lived in the thirteenth century. She belonged to one of the noblest Sienese families, the Tolomei. Her husband was Nello or Paganello dei Pannocieschi of Piebia near Massa Marittima. He suspected her of having betrayed him, and shut her up in a castle of the Maremma, where she died of malaria. According to some chroniclers Nello caused her to be thrown out of one of the windows of the castle. Dante, who probably did not believe her guilty, has placed her in his Purgatory (V. 133–136).

> Ricorditi di me, che son la Pia;
> Siena mi fe'; disfecemi Maremma;
> Salsi colui che, 'nnanellata pria
> Disposando m'avea con la sua gemma.

The tragic story of Pia inspired many of the troubadours and poets throughout the Middle Ages; and strolling minstrels would find ready hearers both in castle and piazza when they sang of an unfortunate love story, or of the daring exploits of famous brigands, like Ghino.

Ghino di Tacco's father had been killed by order of Benincasa, an agent of the Podestà of Siena, and the son knew no peace until he had avenged his father's death.

He and his company established themselves as in an eagle's nest in Radicofani, and one day, selecting four hundred of his bravest and boldest followers, he took swift horses and rode towards Rome, to seek his revenge. He took one of the gates of the city by surprise, and leaving some of his men to guard it went straightway to the Capitol, where he knew he would find Benincasa in his office. Buti says: "Above in the hall where the said Benincasa sat performing his official duties, Ghino killed him, cutting off his head, and left the room without any hindrance."

His prestige increased enormously after this bold deed, and even Dante and Boccaccio enjoyed writing about his legendary prowess and exploits. In the *Decameron* there is a tale that "One day Ghino's followers met a very rich prelate, the Abbot of Cluny—on his way to the Baths of Chiusi, and arrested him. The Abbot threatened them with excommunication, but one of the brigands retorted: 'Messer, you have come to a place where we fear nothing but the power of God; and where both excommunications and interdicts are excommunicated.' The abbot understood the sermon and proceeded to the Baths with a lightened purse. . . . Having finished the cure he took the same road home and was met by Ghino, who, finding him in a reasonable mood, refunded to him the money which he had lost, and also invited him to a great dinner, during which he explained to the Abbot the reason why he had adopted his present mode of life, saying: 'Messer l'Abbate, you must understand that the fact of being a gentleman driven out of his own home, poor, and beset by powerful enemies has induced me, Ghino di Tacco—so as to defend my life and nobility and not through any wickedness of mind—to become a robber on the high-road, and an enemy of the Court of Rome.' "

LA CONSUMA, VIA GARIBALDI, SIENA. HOUSE OF THE BRIGATA SPENDERECCIA.
FROM AN ANCIENT DRAWING.

Such language could not but be pleasing to the thirteenth century Sienese, who admired the brigand, and the French prelate must also have admired him, for when he returned to Rome, he persuaded the Pope to create him "Cavaliere di S. Giovanni," and to allow him a substantial source of income.

There lived at this time in Siena a band of twelve young spendthrifts whose follies and extravagances were recorded in verse by the poet Folgore da Sangimignano. They were called the "Brigata Spendereccia," and lived in a marvellously furnished house, called the "Consuma,"[1] where they entertained lavishly. Their dinners and feasts were on a most expensive scale, their dinner services being of gold and silver, and their robes were made of elegant *rascese*. They slept on beds which had sheets of silk, and quilts of miniver. In a few months hundreds of thousands of gold florins were squandered on their enjoyments.

Folgore da Sangimignano wrote in their honour twelve sonnets, one for each month of the year, describing in full the material joys and pleasures of youth; which consisted of song, dance, and sensuality. In one sonnet he ironically mocks the passion of St. Francis for a life of poverty.

> Chiesa non v'abbia mai nè monastero
> Lassate predicare i preti pazzi
> Ch'hanno troppe bugie e poco vero . . .

(He never had either church or monastery. . . .)

and the refrain of the sonnets was always the same: "Song and Dance."

> Cantar, danzar a la provenzalesca,
> Con istromenti novi de la Magna. . . .

[1] See Illustration.

This kind of poetry, which seemed to pre-figure the paganism of the Renaissance was the sentiment of that class of noblemen which, bound to the Empire, was soon to lose its power.

The young men of the "Brigata Spendereccia" were the worst examples of the aristocratic class. They may be compared with certain French aristocrats of the eighteenth century, who in their love of pleasure spent their time in selfish enjoyment, quite blind to the fact that they were playing on the edge of an abyss. The poets Angiolieri and Folgore were not typical of the real Sienese life, but another poet, Nuccio Piacente, grandfather of Catherine of Siena, a humble quilt-maker, composed love lyrics of such lofty sentiments as to make those of the aristocratic Angiolieri seem vulgar and base. It was poetry such as Nuccio's which revealed the beautiful spiritual fervour that animated the best minds in Siena.

CHAPTER VI

St. Francis

AFTER the victory of Monteaperto a great wave of religious revival spread throughout Siena, entering into the civil life of the people and uniting them in one great aspiration—that *their city should create the best possible Christian Art.* The building of the Cathedral had been started before that of the Palazzo Pubblico, and in 1264 the vault of the Cupola was completed. Giovanni Pisano was called to adorn the façade, while his father Niccolò designed the magnificent ambone or pulpit—a masterpiece of thirteenth-century sculpture. With the help of his son and of a pupil, Arnolfo di Cambio, he finished it in two years of hard work. Such feats as these attest to the fervour of religious zeal which lighted up the souls of the Sienese after their victory over the Florentines, and are a proof of their civic faith being fed by a religious spirit. To the Sienese the Church was like St. Christopher, who bore on his shoulders the child to help him reach the shores beyond the dangerous river of life.

In fact until the Palazzo was built all the public offices were in the Churches. The Podestà was in S. Pellegrino, the Consuls at S. Cristofano, and the College first at S. Vigilio, and later in S. Pietro d'Ovile. This explains the religious, practically church-like character of the Palazzo Pubblico, where Simone di Martino, at the beginning of the sixteenth century painted in the *Sala delle Balestre* his frescoes of the Madonna enthroned with her Son under a rich conopy, which is held over them by apostles surrounded by angels, saints and prophets. Later,

Taddeo di Bartolo, Sano di Pietro, il Vecchietta, and Sodoma, all immortalised in the Palazzo the figures of the greatest Sienese Saints. The Allegorical pictures of life under good and bad rulers show us real life in the world, while the picture of Peace holding out the olive branch, symbol of the theological sentiment of the Church, united the civil and religious ideals.

Sienese Art was always a mirror of religious and civic faith, for the artists always remained loyal to the Statute of 1355, in which they declared themselves to be "by the Grace of God revealers to unlearned men who cannot read, of those marvellous things which operate *by* virtue and *in* virtue of Faith." They were therefore more than artists, intent only on showing their personal genius in the beauty of their paintings, they were, in fact, "pittografi," who wrote with faith and simplicity their stories in their paintings.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the victory of Monteaperto an event of unusual interest took place in the city. Along the streets, which were decorated and strewn with flowers, that wonderful masterpiece, the Madonna of Buoninsegna, was carried in triumph. A chronicler, who was probably present, thus describes the "Festa" of that day: "The picture was carried to the Duomo, accompanied by a worthy and devout company of priests and monks, the Signori del Nove, all the officials of the Commune and the general public. The procession, as was the custom, walked around the Campo, while all the bells of the city rang out a joyous peal in honour of such a noble picture, which picture was made by Duccio di Niccolo, painter, in the house of Muciatti, outside the gate of Stalloreggi. And all that day was given up to orations; all the shops were shut and many alms were

given to the poor, while prayers were offered to God and to His Mother, that Mother who is our advocate, beseeching that we should be defended by His Mercy from adversity and every evil, and from the hands of traitors and enemies of Siena."

Duccio, who was paid three thousand florins for his work, painted it in thirty-two months. He knew that his Madonna was beautiful, and that she did not resemble those rigid Byzantine Madonnas, who, with open and fixed eyes, seem afraid of celestial and earthly chastisements. No, she seemed alive, and even to-day there breathes around her an aroma like that of spring-time. The Virgin of Duccio is a woman of the people—not a Queen. She is the daughter of the great Franciscan and democratic revolution of the Italian people. She has a mother's heart, and knows how to weep with those who weep, because she has herself known grief.

. . . . . .

Among the old manuscripts found in the Convents in Siena are several artistic and literary documents of the thirteenth century, which give evidence of the deep human feeling of sympathy then existing between some of the rich and powerful Sienese merchants, and the friendly relations which they maintained with the religious minds of the time, a relation which enabled them to absorb strength of virtue while pursuing their daily occupations.

One family in particular, the Montaninis, kept up a regular correspondence with the "Blessed" Cristiana Menabuoi, and the letters which passed between them are most interesting. The Montaninis were strong, vigorous, gallant men, engaged in commercial pursuits, who often went to France on business, and in these letters we see reflected the pure transparent sense of faith, of

love and of courtesy shown by these rich and powerful merchants. The "Blessed" Cristiana addressed her letters to "her devoted and most dear friend in Jesus Christ, Guccio di Geri Montanini of Siena," asking him sometimes for a favour, sometimes thanking him for one received, as for instance, having been allowed to use his horse. Sometimes she begs to be remembered in his prayers, and she always ends her epistle with expressions such as : "If here anything can be done which would give thee pleasure, send to command it, and it will be willingly performed." "He Who made thee without thine aid be ever with thee. Amen."

Also the Frate Dionysius "being in great peace," writes from Pisa to admonish his young friend, Guccio, saying: "I well know that from thee I have received and can receive many services, but the greatest service that thou canst do me as well as thy brother whom I love next to thee—or I might even say, nearly as well as I love thee —is this, that thou shouldest persevere and continue in that good way wherein thou hast begun to walk, and that thou might be enabled to do this I often pray to Him who alone can keep thee. But bear in mind that negligence is the greatest enemy of the soul. To think on death is a comfortable thing. Meditate on those who have fallen spiritually, especially in Siena—it is a most useful training. It is well to leave to business men all wordly affairs, so that those who are dedicated to religion may have time for the nourishing of their spiritual life."

The principal object of the teaching of the Saint of Assisi was the same, that is, to deprive riches of undue importance, to draw people away from the pre-occupation of material life, and so show them how much greater are the benefits of an inner spiritual life as the fount of truest joy. At this time the spiritual danger of the people was

STATUE OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI IN ST. FRANCESCO (CHURCH), 1289.
Lombardi.

very great, for they were just emerging from that yoke of feudalism under which they had so long lived, and were becoming engrossed in trade, commerce, money-dealing and the lust for riches. The son of the merchant of Assisi, feeling this, longed to save the souls of the victorious middle class of the thirteenth century. This is why he taught not so much among the country folk, as in the piazze and streets of the young cities of the Commune.

St. Francis of Asisis

St. Francis, "Il Poverello," visited Siena for the first time in 1212. An account of the arrival of the saint is exquisitely told in the following words:—

"One day St. Francis, accompanied by Brother Masseo, was out walking, when they arrived at a place where three roads met. One led to Florence, one to Siena, and the third to Arezzo, so Brother Masseo asked: 'Father, along which road must we go?' St. Francis replied: 'I will give thee a signal. But I command thee for the sake of holy obedience that in this place where thy feet now stand thou do spin round and round just as children do, and thou must not stop until I tell thee.' So then Brother Masseo started spinning round and round, and did it so often, that, his head becoming dizzy (as always happens when this is done), he several times fell down, yet always rising he continued spinning, until suddenly, being ordered to stop, St. Francis asked him: 'Towards what place art thou facing?' Brother Masseo replied: 'Towards Siena.' Then St. Francis said: 'That is the road by which God wishes us to go.' Walking along the road, Brother Masseo wondered at that which the Saint had made him do, as if he were a child, and that before the lay people who passed. Nevertheless out of reverence he did not

dare to say anything to the holy Father. As they approached Siena, the people of the city heard of the arrival of the Saint, and, going forth to meet him, they carried him and his companion as far as the Bishop's house, so that they did not even touch the ground with their feet. And at that very hour a fight was proceeding in the city, two men being already dead, but when St. Francis arrived on the spot, he preached to them so earnestly that all the combatants were made to be 'at peace, unity and concord.' " The ancient chroniclers of Siena tell us not only how the 'Poverello' arrived, but also how he left. One of them (Il Dei), writes: "He left Siena one morning very early, and stopped at the place which to-day is called the tree of St. Francis, and there he thrust into the ground his staff, whereupon there immediately sprang up a big tree, near which they made a hermitage, and the building of the church of St. Francis was begun in honour of the Saint."

An unknown chronicler at the end of the thirteenth century also recounts how "suddenly the pilgrim Saint's staff flourished into a tree."[1]

Perhaps this legend of the miraculous growth arose in order to remind the people how the "Poverello's" holy words were so fruitful, and worked such miraculous changes in men's hearts.

Certainly the efficacy of his short apostleship in Siena must have been great, since in 1226, when his death was announced, the Commune decreed that a Church was to be built in his honour. They started the first Franciscan Church in 1228, the year of the canonisation of the Saint, and it seems to have been finished in 1255. Very probably that first church was of Roman style, not vast like the present church, but small and poor;

[1] Bibl. Com. di Siena Codice, I, 11.5.

yet in it dwelt the spirit of the Saint of Assisi, and the humble as well as the great gathered there, united in the love of a faith which was joy, and which was peace. Rich merchants, towards the end of their lives, disillusioned with the world, having seen the littleness of its vain and empty greatness, would bring to the guardians of the church the money which had, in many cases, been collected by usury and extortion, to be by them distributed amongst the poor. They would also crave a simple burial in the church, or in the cloisters of San Gherardo which was close by.

CHAPTER VII

Provenzano Salvani

AMONG the distinguished men buried in the Church of San Francesco was Provenzano Salvani, the victor of Monteaperto. He, like Dante, had felt within him the strife of two forces. A Ghibelline, proud of his lineage, he had not hesitated to humble himself when he, the first nobleman of the city had thrust aside all the traditions of a feudal aristocracy and had gone down to the Campo to beg alms for a friend who suffered in the Emperor's prison. "And all this he did out of Christian charity":—

Liberamente nel Campo di Siena
Ogni vergogna deposta, s'affisse;
E li, per trar l'amico suo di pena
Che sostenea nella prigion di Carlo,
Si condusse a tremar per ogni vena.

Provenzano had tremendous faith in the people of Siena. He felt the force of democracy which pervaded their new ideals, and he held high hopes for the future prosperity of the city. An old Italian political poem, said by Celso Cittadini to have been written in 1262 by a Sienese, describes how Provenzano comforts a certain Rugieri, who fears the Pope's displeasure because several

prominent Guelph families had left Siena after the battle of Monteaperto:—

Rugieri, or ti konforta
Et abi giuoko et riso
Gieso Cristo la tiene et porta
Da llui non è diviso
Lo franko popolo accieso
La porrà in altura
Siena, cio m'è viso
Città di natura!"

Rugieri is bidden to be of good cheer, bright and smiling, for Christ will uphold, and Siena, City of Nature, will be carried up on high.

Provenzano's popularity caused envy amongst his fellow-citizens: and he was hated by Cavolino Tolomei to the extent that in the rout of Colle, 1269, he caused him to be beheaded.

Another enemy was the Signora Sapia of Castiglioncello. She is said to have been so furious with hate of the Sienese—her own people—that she cried out that, had the Sienese won, she would have thrown herself out of the window, so much did she hate them; "and especially that Provenzano so powerful and famous."

When Dante visited Siena he saw only the ruins of the glorious palace of the victor of Monteaperto, for it had been razed to the ground by the Guelph Meo Tolomei. In his *Purgatorio* the poet shows that Provenzano will find eternal salvation as a reward for his noble Christian act in favour of his friend. He also shows how Sapia was cleansed by Franciscan love, for he places her—not in Hell—but in the second circle of Purgatory, where she leans against the hard edge of a mountain, wearing a mantle of hair cloth, the lids of her eyes stitched with

wire, but having the certainty that she will one day open them in the light of Heaven, for the holy intercessions of Pier Pettinagno have won for her a pardon. She makes humble confession in the words:—

> Pace volli con Dio in su lo stremo
> de la mia vita; ed ancor non sarebbe
> lo mio dover, per penitenza, scemo,
> se ciò non fosse, che a memoria m'ebbe
> Pier Pettinagno in sue sante orazioni;
> a cui di me per caritate increbbe.
> (*Purgatorio* xiii, 124–129).

Pier Pettinagno[1] was a poor man, a seller of carding combs and weaving combs. He belonged to the Third Order of St. Francis. Simple, humble, honest, he won by his virtues the love and admiration of his fellow-citizens, among whom he went about doing good. On his death in 1289 the voice of the people proclaimed him a Saint, and seven days later the Republic ordered that a magnificent sepulchre should be erected for him in the Church of San Francesco. "*Super tumulum Sancti Petri Pectenarii, venerabilis civis Senensis, unum sepulcrum nobile cum ciborio et altari.*"

After the fire of 1665 the tomb of the poor disciple of the Third Order of St. Francis was destroyed. Little cared the seventeenth century for the devotion of a "Blessed" Pettinagno, and there only remains the bright memory of this saintly man in the great poem of Dante.

[1] Sometimes called Pettinaio.

CHAPTER VIII

Beato Sorore—Beato Andrea Gallerani

THE Hospital della Scala, the place sacred to grief, to poverty and to death, rose up severely in front of the majestic Duomo as if to be a reminder to the faithful of the Eternal truth of life, the torturing supreme mystery which can only be explained in God.

The Hospital was the first home of Sienese Mysticism, the place where nearly all the holy citizens began their heroic novitiate. Its foundation goes back to the earliest days, for it was at first a simple "Pellegrinaio" or lodging house for pilgrims, said to have been started by a man of the people called Sorore. In 1090 we find it mentioned in a certain document as being already a hospital Institution. It became very rich, and many other cities, copying the example of Siena, built hospitals and placed them under the direction of the Rector of the Hospital della Scala.

Beato Sorore

The life of the mysterious Sorore is hidden in the legend of a beautiful medieval dream of peace, which the brushes of Taddeo and Domenico di Bartolo wonderfully described in the fourteenth century on the bare walls of the Hospital of Santa Maria della Scala, the place where once Sorore had his paternal home, on the ruins of an ancient temple of Minerva.

Piero was the name of the father and Grazia that of the mother of the "Beato." Ancient chroniclers give the date of his birth as March 25th, 832. Prior to his birth his mother, Grazia, had a strange vision. A ladder, the top of which touched the sky, appeared to her, and on it the unborn child ascended Heavenward, while at the foot

an immense concourse of persons stood gazing up, awestruck. An old biographer, with marvellous ingenuity, interprets the vision as showing that by virtue of his holy works the child would ascend to the Heaven of Heavens and contemplate the Divine Essence, or that he would be the founder of the hospital. Later on, when the hospital was re-built, it was found that a ladder which was removed was composed of three steps, which signified three degrees by which Paradise was reached. The first step symbolises the fundamental Faith of the spiritual edifice; the second, Hope —without which what is desired cannot be obtained; the third, Charity—the highest of all virtues, which brings the soul into communion with angelic spirits.

The union of rich and poor, weak and powerful, constitutes the true strength of a State, assuring to it the continued progress of internal peace; and this is the political thought that can be discerned underlying the religious ideals of Sorore.

Siena, we may say, can boast of having been the first city among those that attained to the life of a Commune—to study and decide some of the grave economic and social problems of the day.

As early as the ninth century she saw arising and flourishing the best hospital in Italy, for the succour of the sick poor and foundlings;[1] and she also saw the undertaking prosper financially. This famous hospital of Siena is built on the foundation of the house of the cobbler Sorore: the humble home that the Sienese man of the people opened, at the same time as he opened his heart, to welcome and receive the poor pilgrims, the hungry, the suffering, and the abandoned babies.

[1] See Illustration.

SCENES IN THE HOSPITAL—ALMSGIVING.
DOMENICO DI BARTOLO, 14TH CENTURY.

The love and charity of this servant of Christ, who was in truth a friend of human grief, was as great as was his poverty. But with little he did great things. The rich, seeing his generosity, tried to copy him, and large alms were given to help on his charitable work, so that he was able to multiply the fruits of his charity a hundredfold: so much so, that the good he did in Siena is said to have aroused the envy of the Devil to that extent that he longed to destroy his influence. Amongst the many legends of the time there is one which contains a kernel of reality, and gives us a glimpse of fervent mediæval faith. "With the consent of God, Satan disguised himself as a pilgrim and went one day to ask Sorore for a lodging. Sorore received him lovingly into his house and gave him the best bed on which to rest. The following morning the Devil presented himself before Sorore saying to him, 'For the charity thou hast shown to me I am much obliged, but for the outrage done to me I can only grieve—because, coming here to lodge with thee, there has happened to me a thing that has never been done to me in any inn or in any other place—that is, a good sum of money that I carried has been stolen from me, and I find that I have been wrong in my opinion of thee. Thou art not that holy man full of charity that the world thinks thou art, but a public highwayman, robbing the poor pilgrims, as thou hast robbed me of my purse with so much money.'

"Sorore was astonished and nearly beside himself at hearing these words, so that he could hardly speak; but being so innocent, pure, and simple, he could not believe that the other spoke lies, and wondered if any of the other pilgrims whom he had lodged had committed the theft, so he began to make a diligent search of the house to try to find the purse, which the lying Devil insisted that

he had stolen. Not finding it, poor Sorore lovingly exhorted the pilgrims, if any of them, being tempted of the Devil, had really committed the theft, to return the purse for the good of their souls, and to remove from his house such a scandal, for, if known, nobody would ever come there again for shelter. All the pilgrims were bewildered at these words, and to show that they were not ungrateful to their benefactor, they let him see everything they possessed, stripping themselves so as to give satisfaction to the importunate accuser, who continued to exclaim against the servant of God: 'I will not be satisfied, for it is thou, and not these who hast robbed me.' With insults and coarse words he then went and denounced Sorore to the Court. Being called before the Tribunal, Sorore gave his testimony, but so great was the perfidy and vehemence of the Demon that, indeed, not only the ministers of justice, but other citizens were beginning to rise against him, suspecting that the Devil's evidence was only too true. As the judge deliberated whether he should commit him to prison, Sorore took from around his neck a little bag of relics which he carried to the judge, saying to him, 'Signore, make him swear on these that what he has said before your tribunal is true, that he did bring to my house a purse—and afterwards do with me as you please.'

"On hearing these words the Devil uttered a dreadful cry, and disappeared, leaving behind him the fumes of sulphur, and other noxious smells. The onlookers were stupefied, and Sorore, returning to his home in peace, was henceforth regarded as a saint." But one practical result of the Devil's envy was that ever after Sorore made an exact inventory of everything brought into the house by his guests. This custom is continued to this very day in the hospital.

Sorore died in his native city on the 15th of August, 898, as foretold by the Queen of the Angels. The legend says: "The first Sunday of August, 898, while Sorore was praying, there appeared unto him the Virgin, who thus spoke: 'As thou hast served me for so many years with sincerity of heart I wished to come to say to thee to-day that thy holy works have been greatly acceptable to my Son, and they will not be passed over without reward in Heaven; and the stairway which thou hast made will be the means by which many will mount up to Him, and many *have* mounted. However, so that thou mightest now rest thyself from so much work, and receive for it more reward, prepare thyself for death in the present month, on the day of my Assumption, for as on that day both on earth and in Heaven great feasts are made in my honour, so, thy ascension to Heaven will give similar joy to all the celestial Court.' Having thus spoken, the vision vanished, leaving Sorore filled with spiritual joy. He then took leave of his companions, the Brothers of the Hospital, with a fatherly discourse, which was 'his last Will.'

"As the day of his death drew near he withdrew from all his hospital duties so as to prepare himself to die. Two days later he was taken ill with a high fever, and on the morning of the Day of Assumption, when the priest in the solemn Mass came to the words *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, Sorore lifted his eyes to Heaven, joined his hands together and gave up his soul to God."[1]

[1] The Blessed Sorore is a creation of the fantastic mysticism of the Sienese people. Padre Lombardelli, who in 1600 occupied himself in tracing the life of this singular figure, had no critical aim when compiling his history. But we find that the thirteenth century legend owes its origin to the fact that on May 24th, 1492, when alterations were being made in the fabric of the hospital, an urn was found with the words, B. Soror. The Latin Soror was interpreted Sorore; and it was quite easy to find that B. stood for "Beato." So, not only was the people's belief in the sanctity of the founder confirmed; but it was also said that his relics had been found.

The work of public charity which, pervaded by the Franciscan spirit, had found in Siena an apostle in the "Blessed" Pettinagno and its Baptist in the symbolic Sorore, is in reality the expression of its lay Christian feeling. From the thirteenth century the Hospital began to make itself the centre of all the beneficent works of the city, and many legacies and rich gifts were given to it. In a short time it became a very wealthy institution, and at the beginning of the fourteenth century possessed much land and more than fifty granges, or fortified storehouses for its grain.

The works of mercy of Sorore so wonderfully depicted by Domenico and Taddeo di Bartolo and their assistants in the halls and along the passages of the Sienese Hospital, introduce us to the intimate life of the thirteenth century houses, and to the curious customs of the citizens of that day. We know from the chroniclers how soon it became the habit for gentlemen and gentlewomen during dinner and supper time all the year, and especially in summer, to go to the Hospital, and providing themselves with clothes which would protect them from dirt and infection, to serve with their own hands the infirm men and women.

In the frescoes, which are marvellously realistic, we see again the men and women of the ancient Sienese nobility at the beds of the sick; going in and out in the midst of the crowd of hospital brothers who were enveloped in their long black cloaks, on which fell the hood, like that of the bishops, and wearing on their heads the almond-shaped coif, tied under the chin so as to cover the ears. We see the physicians and surgeons furnished with the instruments of this profession, provided with phials, boxes of ointments and linen cloths; and in other rooms the priests are administering the sacraments to the dying.

[1] See Illustration.

Here at the door of the Hospital crowd the poor[1] assembled for the distribution of the little loaves of bread and clothing; while the foster-mothers, gravely seated on the ground, are feeding the abandoned babies found in the "Ruota." The older children who have grown up under the care of this pious institution, are intent on learning to spell, and are writing on slips of paper under the guidance of a stern "Brother," armed with a long ruler. The young unmarried girls sit bashfully with bent heads awaiting to be asked in marriage. The scene on the day of the "Richiesta" (marriage proposal) is worthy to be described in the words of a chronicler who was present.

"Every year on Thursday and Friday of Holy Week tables covered with the whitest of cloths were adorned with flowers and placed in front of the superb building of the Hospital. Benches were brought out and put against the walls facing the Cathedral, and on them sat for several hours each day the young women who wished to marry. They sat with eyes bent down and folded hands, displaying in their attitude the greatest modesty, and singing praises which showed their devotion. During these two days it was permitted to certain young men and older men who were unmarried to present themselves before the young women, and to show by signs which of them they desired to marry. The 'Camarlengo' of the Hospital would then write down the name, surname, and birthplace of both man and woman. He would also make diligent enquiries into the condition of the man, to see if he were a good man, and also in a position to keep a wife. The Santa Casa would, if everything was satisfactory, give the woman the usual dowry, and would always look after her interests, and should she be widowed, would take every care of her as a daughter."

[1] See Illustration.

From that day forward the young girls remained in the "Ruota," like cloistered nuns, reserved and quiet, until the day of their marriage, their only recreation being to visit certain churches on holy days. Even then they were always accompanied by matrons, widows, guardians, or old people, who also escorted them to pay their vows, or obtain indulgences in the Hospital Church.

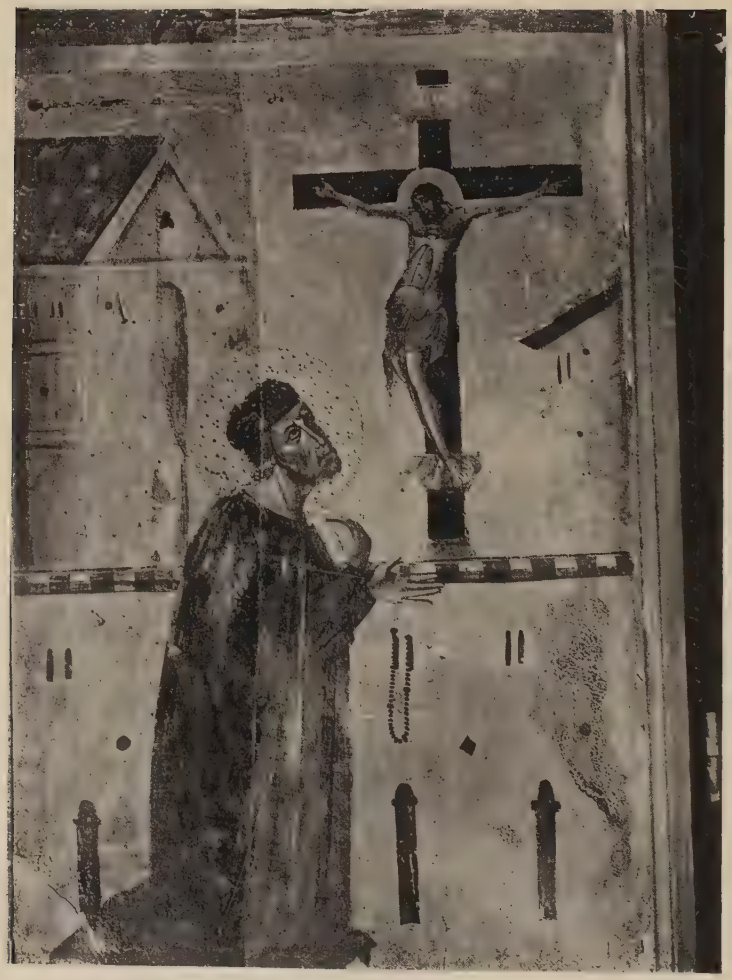
Certainly it was the faces of such women as these that could be used as models by the early artists, to typify the sweet image of the Virgin in those pictures of gold which were placed over the altar, surrounded by angels.

How different were those early artists from later Sienese artists who took as a type of perfection the *Raffaella del Piccolomini*.—Other times, other customs!

Meanwhile, among all the pompous and refined elegance of the Renaissance, which in Siena flashed out in its full splendour and with excesses of Pagan corruption, the Sienese woman remained always as Bargagli describes her, a gentlewomen "at the presence of whom the eyes are filled with pleasure, the ears consoled, the spirits restored, the intellect is nourished, the abilities become stronger, more refined and more perfect. . . . She disdains to give herself up all day or all night to dancing, as is the custom in some places."

The Sienese women will always continue to irradiate a little of that light which she inherits from the traditional virtue of those noble and chaste "Madonne" of the thirteenth century; those who in the picture of Matteo di Giovanni betray in their profoundly sad faces all the grief of a long-lost treasure.

The Hospital lodged the poor pilgrims, gathered in and educated the abandoned children, and nursed all diseases except leprosy. This was treated in the "Lebrosario" of St. Lazzaro. The lepers were not



BLESSED ANDREA GALLERANI, 13TH CENTURY.
GALLERY OF BELLE ARTI, SIENA.

allowed to live within two miles of the city, and they wandered about the country roads with a bell hung around their necks to warn the people of their approach. The condition of these unfortunate persons was most terribly painful, and offered to the Mystics great opportunities for exercising a most heroic charity. Among the most interesting of these benefactors is

Beato Andrea Gallerani

The exact date of his birth is not known, but it was some time before 1219, for in that year he—together with his fellow-citizens—is mentioned as having fought against the Commune of Orvieto. Born of an ancient, noble family, both he and his father were brave cavaliers. In an encounter with the Orvietans he fought a duel with their chief Andrea Martinelli, whom he killed, thus gaining the victory for his own men.

His only love was love of God and of country. So zealous was he for the glory and greatness of God, that one day, meeting with a man who blasphemed, he fell on him and killed him. The Podestà of Siena having ordered his arrest, he fled to one of his castles in the Maremma, where the officers of the law were told to follow and capture him. An ancient legend gives us a description of his miraculous escape. "The emissaries of the Podestà having entered the castle, they were on the point of putting their hands on Gallerani, when all at once they saw him vanish. A cloud had descended from the sky, had enveloped the cavalier and borne him three miles away from the Castle." According to the popular legend this miracle caused Gallerani to change his whole life. From henceforth he gave himself up entirely to works of charity in expiation of his crime, and the Signoria of Siena withdrew the order for his

arrest. Andrea sold all his goods, so as to distribute the money amongst the poor. He became a true brother to all the unhappy, to the lepers and to the derelicts of Siena and the country around. The admiration of the people for such a life of sacrifice and mercy gave rise to the most wonderful legends of strange miracles. He was a mighty man of prayer. Each evening on returning home from his works of charity he would shut himself up in a little oratory which he had in the house, where he would spend the whole night in prayer. To avoid being overcome by sleep he tied to his hair a small cord which was attached to the ceiling of the room, so that should he feel drowsy and droop his head he would be aroused by the pull on his hair. An unknown artist of the Trecento has drawn a picture of him, showing the little cord which served to keep him awake,[1] and also another picture where Gallerani is seen distributing bread to the poor,[2] a wonderfully descriptive scene in the life of the holy man, showing one of the streets of the thirteenth-century Siena.

Like all the early Sienese, Gallerani was very devoted to the Virgin Queen of the city. As he walked along he would cry to the people: "I entreat you to place your hope in my Madonna; think of her as the Queen of our City."

The ancient legend relates that "the mystic Queen sometimes came down from Heaven to visit her devoted follower, appearing to him surrounded by heavenly splendour." Old historians speak of a hospice called the Misericordia which was built by Gallerani about 1240 on the site of the present "Istituto di Belle Arti." Here he founded a congregation of men called the "Frati della Misericordia," who helped in the care of the sick. This hospice existed for about a hundred years, being

[1] See Illustration. [2] See Illustration.

THE BLESSED ANDREA GALLERANI DISTRIBUTING BREAD TO THE POOR, 13TH CENTURY, GALLERY OF BELLE ARTI.

suppressed in 1408, when all its possessions were absorbed in those of the Hospital della Scala. But the memory of Gallerani and the Frati was still treasured by the Sienese, for on the 1st of May, 1344, a body of men was formed to carry in all public processions a standard on which was painted the figure of the saint, kneeling before the Crucifix in the act of prayer, as the unknown artist had depicted him. This body of Sienese mystics, wholly dedicated to works of charity, had at first their home under the Convent of San Domenico, but in 1569 they moved to the crypt of the Church of the Sapienza, not far from the spot where Gallerani had founded his Hospital.

Although never canonised as a saint by the Church, Gallerani is nearly always mentioned in old Sienese documents as "Saint." In the list of names of the different companies which passed along the streets in a long procession during the Feast of Corpus Domini, this particular company of men was always called "The Company of *Saint* Andrea Gallerani."

This custom of calling men of particular virtue Saints was a very common thing in Italian cities, and more especially in Siena, during the Middle Ages; so much so that the Bishops of Siena were more than once reproved and censured by Rome for allowing the people to acclaim as saints those who had not first been recognised as such by the Church, which saw in this custom a dangerous abuse.

CHAPTER IX

St. Galgano

THE prototype of the mediæval Sienese Saint—who succeeded the legendary Roman Saints, such as Vittorio and Ansano, was the young Cavalier Galgano, a figure who belongs rather to mythology than to history. In a book[1] preserved in the Communal Library of Siena, we read a very beautiful legend about Galgano, a legend which carries us away with its fresh charm of vision to a solitary mount of white alabaster, called Monte Siepi, where we can still see the grand ruins of the church consecrated to St. Galgano.

During the canonisation of the Saint, his mother, Dionisia, narrated the visions seen by her son in a dream, and their subsequent realisation. "His horse carried him to Monte Siepi and there he stuck his sword into a rock and it formed a cross.[2] Three times he decided to return to the world where he had led a dissolute and wicked life, but each time a mysterious force kept him back. St. Michael led him to a river over which was a very long bridge to cross which would entail much fatigue. Under the bridge the vision showed him a mill which continually whirled around. This signified earthly things in perpetual motion. He was then taken to a lovely meadow covered with flowers, whose delicious perfume filled the air. Leaving the meadow he went by an underground passage to Monte Siepi where he found

[1] Com. Cod. miscel. C. VI, 8 from 179 to 204.

[2] See Illustration.

SAN GALGANO. UNKNOWN ARTIST, 15TH CENTURY.
Lombardi.

twelve apostles in a round house. . . . They placed before him an open book, on a page of which was written: *Quoniam non cognovi literaturam introibo in potentias Domini; Domine, memorabor notitie tue solius.* (As I am not a literary man I will enter into the knowledge of God, and will think of Thee only, etc., etc.)

These visions caused Galgano di Chiusdino, an illiterate cavalier, to become a man of immense faith, and to embrace the life of a hermit, living on the mount he had seen in his dreams. The legend relates that he died one year later at the age of thirty-three. His hermit life was of short duration, and so very little is known of it that he would probably have been forgotten, were it not that the immediate results of the dreams of this cavalier were wonderfully effective on the religious life of the day.

Even in 1185, only four years after his death, there had been built in Monte Siepi a round church like the house seen by Galgano in his vision, and in that very year he was canonised by Pope Lucio III. Close to the church, which still exists, there arose rapidly a great Cistercian monastery, and Monte Siepi became the centre of the Cistercian teaching in Tuscany.[1]

The monks, many of whom came from the Abbey of Clairvaulx, began, towards 1224, to build a church, the style of which reminds us of Casamari.

A certain Fra Ugolino di Maffeo was the designer, and he must have been one of those "Magistri lapidum," who often possessed the genius of great architects. The fabric was already well advanced in 1224 and certainly finished in 1288.

[1] The Cistercian Order, founded by San Roberto about the end of the eleventh century in order to re-act against the luxury and wordly spirit that had entered into the Benedictine Order, was organised in a regular manner by S. Bernardo.

L'abbazia di San Galgano—Arch. Antonio Canestrelli. Florence, Alinari, 1895.

The monks soon acquired authority and esteem in the Republic, enjoying as they did the fullest trust of the Roman Curia; and being for the greater part French, they must also have offered a most useful means of helping commercial relationships between France and the great business houses of Siena. Many of them were called in as arbiters in business matters between some of the Bishops and the Commune; several were treasurers of the public exchequer, some were workers of the "Opera del Duomo," while all took an active and useful part in the life of the young Commune, which in its turn rewarded their fidelity and helped their Order by giving them full protection. They were all men of action, and the Monastery of San Galgano never appeared suitable as a refuge to those who were chiefly desirous of a purely spiritual or contemplative life.

When, in 1313, three Sienese noblemen, Giovanni di Mino Tolomei, Ambrogio di Mino Piccolomini, and Patrizio di Francesco Patrizi, being disgusted with the world, resolved to leave it and give themselves to a life of prayer, they never dreamed of knocking for admittance at the door of San Galgano. They might perhaps have gone to Lecceto or to one of the Franciscan monasteries, but in the latter the democratic spirit was too pronounced, and Lecceto was at that time very crowded. So these three young nobles decided to found a new Order, an aristocratic Order, which they started at Monteoliveto.

CHAPTER X

Giovanni Tolomei of Monteoliveto

TOLOMEI, born in 1272, had spent his childhood and boyhood in an atmosphere filled on the one hand with Ghibelline hatred, and on the other with Christian mysticism, in the midst of murderous men like his relations, Cavolino and Meo, the enemies of Salvani, and surrounded by the sweet Christian examples of the "Blessed" Nera and the "Blessed" Giovan Battista Tolomei, but it is not known what decided him to embrace the religious life.

Tolomei and Patrizi together with Piccolomini and a certain Francesco, whose family name is not known, one day went out of Siena by the Porta Romana and walked as far as a place called Acona, above Buonconvento, where the Tolomei family had some property. There they remained in a small house, which with their own hands they transformed into a large building, and also built a church, the remains of which could be seen in 1450. Here in the solitude and silence of the country they lived a life of prayer, tilling the soil and fulfilling the laws of evangelical poverty. The fame of their sanctity soon spread over Italy until it reached the ears of the Pope, John XXII, who was always suspicious of heretical motives. He at once sent to Cardinal Bertrando del Poggetto, who was at that time in Tuscany, and commanded him to go to Acona to find out all about the lives of the four hermits. The Cardinal went and exhorted them to submit themselves to the laws of

the "Concilio Lateranense" of 1215, which would oblige them to choose one of the monastic rules approved by Rome. So on March 26th, 1319, Tolomei and his companions appeared before Tarlati, the Bishop of Arezzo, to ask his approval of a new Monteoliveto Order, modelled on that of St. Benedict. The power and expansion of this religious order—characteristically Sienese—is closely connected with the glory of the republic, but what makes it important for us to see is how Monteoliveto continued to represent in its religious movement and also in its rules, the same traditional thought, clothed in the identical aristocratic character, which had animated the founders of the Order, those men who had chosen the Benedictine rule rather than the democratic Franciscan or Dominican.

We find that those not of high lineage were not made welcome at Monteoliveto, while those of illegitimate birth were excluded, and this spirit of exclusion seemed so little Christian-like to Catherine Benincasa, who tried to democratise the Olivet Brothers, that in one of her letters to Brother Giusto, Prior of the Monastery, she recommended him when accepting the postulants not to put too much stress "on any dignity, or lowness, or grandeur, or illegitimacy—that the Son of God, in Whose footsteps we should tread, never refused nor shrank from any person because of his outward condition, state, legitimacy, or illegitimacy, or goodness, or sinfulness!" At one point she exclaims: "And what matter how they were born!" "Let them be born as they may, God no more despises the soul of one born in sin than He does the soul of one born in wedlock." When she knew that the Prior had refused—in spite of her recommendation—to accept a postulant who was illegitimate, she wrote to him with all frankness: "I marvel greatly that

you have refused him, and I have great admiration for such a decision." In this reply of the Saint is displayed a touch of irony and also of displeasure which gives us a better idea of the profound difference between the two Sienese Mystics, the one representative of the democratic mysticism of new men, the other of the conservative of the old order; the former freed for ever from all conventional worries, intent upon breaking up the chains of the old monastic rules, so as to make the liberal spirit of the Gospel triumph in the apostolic exercises of charity—the other, shut up according to ancient traditions in imposing monasteries, where the Florentine Art of the most celebrated painters did not stand so much for an invitation to prayer, as an invitation to celebrate the pomps of the order, as did the frescoes of Sodoma and Signorelli in the cloisters of Monteoliveto.

Part II.

CHAPTER I

Filippo degli Agazzari

JUST as all ancient houses had their big family hearths, so every city possessed one place in particular, one little nook nearly always silent and hidden from the world, where the mystic flame of faith was wont to burn more brightly, perfuming with an odour of sanctity the air breathed by those who dwelt there; and where throughout the centuries there always remained, either in the custodians or, when these were wanting, in the very place itself, in the very stones, the habits, thoughts and sentiments of the perfect spiritual life. Siena possessed such a mystic hearth in the hermitage of Lecceto: *Ilicetum vetus sanctitatis illicium*, at one time called "Foltignano," and later "Selva del Lago" (Wood of the Lake), because it stood near a small lake or pool that has since disappeared. This pool, surrounded by thick ilex-trees, could boast of having given its name to the ancient hermitage of San Agostino; and we can still see the tower of the church in the midst of the evergreen wood, and still hear its bell ringing as it has done for centuries at mid-day and sunset, over the fields of Marciano, inviting to prayer the country folk around.

Tradition affirms that it was in the forest of Lecceto that those Sienese converted to Christianity by San Ansano took refuge, and in the Chronicles of the City it is written that S. Agostino, S. Monica, S. Girolamo, S.

FRESCOES IN LECCETO, BY PAOLA DI NERI, 14TH CENTURY.
SCENES OF WAR AND THE CHASE.

Lombardi.

Domenico and St. Francis, with various Popes and other men of God, sought religious peace in that alluring hermitage.

Beato Filippo degli Agazzari, towards the end of the fourteenth century wrote his lively *Assempri*[1] in this hermitage, and Paolo di Maestro Neri, a disciple of Ambrogio Lorenzetti, painted on the walls his wonderfully vivid scenes of private life, both works of great importance as showing the contemporary history of Sienese life.

Fra Filippo belonged to the noble family of Agazzari, or Gazzaia as it was first called. His father's name was Leonardo Cola. The precise date of his birth is not known, but as an ancient biographer mentions that, when he died (before 1422), he was an octogenarian, and assuming that he became a "brother" of S. Agostino when he was about fifteen (in 1353), we may conclude that he was born about 1339.

From 1398, that is for about twenty-four years, he was Prior of his Monastery.

When he first entered into the peace of Lecceto he found that ten years earlier Paolo di Neri had represented on the walls of the portico of the Monastery the battles, passions and amusements of men of the world, as if for the express purpose of showing to Filippo a vision of the kingdom of Satan, and incite him to write his *Assempri*.

It appears incredible how this practically unknown artist of the thirteenth century had been able to depict in such a dramatic manner and with such force of artistic genius, the life and habits of his day. These frescoes

[1] Translator's note: The "Assempri" (Examples) collected together by the author of this book were undiscovered for many years. A critic says of them: "One of the pleasantest and richest books one can read nowadays; fresh, frank, rich in a language of imagination . . . only comparable to that joyous and crystalline fount, which seems to gush forth in the sermons of S. Bernadino."

give us a better idea than do any written descriptions of how these early mystics believed in the power of the Devil.

In the centre of one fresco is shown a beautiful cart, adorned as if for a festive occasion, drawn by white horses; and filled with a jovial company playing light music. It is followed by many people. Cupid hovers above shooting his flaming darts, and all appears to be fun and frolic, *but* on one of the horses rides a two-headed devil with one face turned towards an open volume in which he enters every word, every act, every amorous glance, *on the credit side* of his Account book.

In these scenes the Devil, as in the *Assempri* of Fra Filippo, and also in the mind of the Sienese of that day, is the omnipresent spirit, the untiring, insidious traitor, the vigilant and awful enemy.

Another fresco depicts a company of hunters who with long spears try to wound a wild boar, while the Devil, hidden among the branches of a tree, eagerly watches them. Behind the bench of a money-changer is seen another little demon cunningly watching transactions, and in the picture of a tribunal satanic insinuations are shown descending towards the ears of the judge along waves of sound, represented by zigzag lines. In one fresco we see that the fishermen cannot even let down their nets without being menaced by a malignant spirit on the prow; and while soldiers fight on the bastions and towers of a besieged city, infernal monsters stand by eagerly waiting to snatch away the souls of the fallen.

One of the most curious and lifelike scenes is that in which the painter shows up the passions of gamblers. Table games, like those of dice, of hazard, of "zara a chi tocca" and "zara all'avanzo" were in fashion at that time, and the players, for the most part the scum of the

FRESCOES IN LECCETO, BY PAOLO DI NERI, 14TH CENTURY.
SCENES OF LIFE IN SIENA.

Lombardi.

people, knaves and cheats, would go down to the Campo where the Commune had assigned to them a special place. There they would often be joined by people of the better class, as if it had been a theatre, and a thirteenth century poet thus describes the scene:—

Gentiluomini e donne v'han allato
Che spesso veggion venire alle mani
Le trecche, e'barattier ch'anno giocato.

. . . . . .

E vedesi chi perde con gran soffi
Bestemmiar colla mano alla mascella
E ricevere e dare molti ingoffi.

And Paolo di Neri in his fresco shows how, as the poet says, the losing player stands up "hot with rage" ready to give his adversary a blow. Behind the aggressor he paints a demon looking on delightedly at the scene.

In none of his pictures does the artist show an angel of God coming to the aid of miserable mortals. "No," he seems to say, "the world is the indisputable kingdom of Satan, and outside the cloister there is no salvation, no port of refuge for the soul." Filippo in his fifty-first *Assempro* gives a description which is the result of the meditations of the monks on life in the world outside. "These are they who lead idle lives, always living in company; brawling and chattering; speaking vain and idle words; grumbling and slandering others; always playing abominable games; always dishonest in acts and words; walking about aimlessly; hunting, eating and drinking the whole time just like beasts; always doing dangerous and abominable actions; making false sales and iniquitous contracts; feasting; giving banquets, and utterly regardless of the poor around them." . . . It is not to be wondered at, in face of these descriptions of

lazy, dissolute laymen, that the minds of the young monks were filled with hatred of the world without, and were full of joy when they saw the punishment dealt out to it by the Devil. This is why they eagerly collected together in their excited fancies the echoes of strange miracles and terrible punishments which were said to have befallen both male and female sinners; echoes that the rude popular faith of the day so magnified ere they reached the silence of the cloister, that hermitages became "gardens" for the culture of these vivid and highly exaggerated descriptions which were the outcome of the mystic mind of the people; so that, when Fra Filippo at the age of fourteen entered into the religious peace of Lecceto, he found himself in an atmosphere which helped him to write his *Assempri.*

Of the literary works of Fra Filippo, which appear to have been very numerous, there only remain to us two manuscripts, which are in the Communal Library of Siena, and both being autographed, there can be no doubt as to their authenticity.

Turning over these 162 pages of close writing, written in a firm hand and in beautiful clear lettering, we seem to have present with us the spirit of the Augustine monk, and when we remember that the sixty-first *Assempro* (there were sixty-two in all), was written in 1416, when Fra Filippo was nearly eighty, we marvel how the hand of an old man could trace the words so clearly, without the least tremor or uncertainty, as if the rhythm of the words, so tranquil and even, corresponded to the beating of the robust heart. He was at peace with God and with men.

These tales of his, written in the beautiful and simple language of the Sienese people, aimed at trying to correct his contemporaries of their dominating vices; the gambling and usury of the men, and the vanity of the women.

He narrates facts which to those fourteenth-century men who lived in the "marvellous" seemed in no way extraordinary, and in order to substantiate what he says, he frequently mentions the unimpeachable source from which the monks had obtained the facts, "from an ancient venerable woman—from a very old venerable and conscientious man—from a very great servant of God—it was said by a monk worthy to be believed," etc.

CHAPTER II

The "Assempri" of Fra Filippo

WHEN Fra Filippo was a child the first revolution against beautiful works of antiquity took place in Siena. In 1345 there was discovered, near to the foundation of the house of the Malavolti, a magnificent statue that seemed to resemble the Venere Anadiomene. It can well be imagined the exultation which this discovery excited among the people; the people who in June, 1311, had carried in procession the lovely Madonna of Duccio. Again now, at the sight of such beauty, a triumphal procession was arranged to bear the heathen goddess of Love to the fountain of the Piazza which she was to adorn,—that "Fonte Gaia" which used to give forth copious water in 1343.

Then for several years there reigned as Queen of the mystic city—not the Virgin Mary—but the goddess of Love, Venere Anadiomene, whose divinely glorious image, marvellously lovely, was enthroned in the public piazza of the Campo, and the ancient chroniclers say that everybody was filled with rapture "at so great a marvel, and so much art."

Owing, however, to unexpected changes of fortune that overtook the Republic, the spirit of mysticism once more supervened in Siena, and, unfortunately, to the destruction of the lovely statue. Being looked upon as the cause of the misfortunes of the Republic, and as a temple of the Devil, this splendid work of art was one day in 1357 dragged down from the "Fonte Gaia" by the furious people and smashed into a thousand pieces.

Even the pieces were taken out of Siena and buried a long way off in Florentine ground! Thus there was seen in Siena one of those revolts of Faith against Art which Rome had already seen at the fall of the Imperial epoch.

The city kept alive and vigorous within her walls her spirit of mediæval faith. In the Middle Ages those deities to whom once altars and temples had been erected did not die, and did not disappear, but were simply transformed into demons. Jove, Juno, Diana, Apollo, Mercury, Neptune, Venus, the fauns, the satyrs, the nymphs survived in the nether regions of the Christian's Hell, crowding with strange terrors the minds of the faithful, and giving rise to lovely and also to fearful legends.

Satan personified in himself all pagan corruption. The Christians believed the pagan world to be the work of Satan. It was the corrupt habits of the Trecento which gave rise to those fanciful satanic representations by poets, saints and ingenuous monks like Fra Filippo, which in Florence inspired Dante Alighieri in the creation of his infernal regions, and in Pisa inspired Orcagna in the terribly marvellous scenes of the Camposanto. We owe to Satan many masterpieces of Christian art, but we owe them to an idea of Satan which one may call Christian, being the result of a clash between adverse philosophies and civilisation in which the Church remained the victor.

When the Spirit of Evil has a real hold over the minds of men, one no longer sees him grinding his teeth, or giving out sulphur fumes, or handling pitchforks in the artistic fancies of believers, artists, and writers of romances. When Evil itself becomes a myth, and corruption is at its height under an exterior of elegance, when the Devil is no longer spoken of, and indeed there is some

doubt as to his existence, as well as the existence of moral laws, then the mysterious Spirit dwells in peace with men; for he is master, and a master does not interfere with the obedient slave.

If we think for a while of the symbolic personage who was named Satan, we shall see that the fear of him which so troubled the Christian masses, was not so much a sign of low superstition as a sign of spiritual strife against vulgar vices and passions; a desire for the triumph of an elevated moral idealism, for the triumph of the spiritual over the material.

. . . . . .

Fra Filippo degli Agazzari expresses in fact, in his characteristic *Demonophobia*, this ideality of strife for the Christian elevation of the spirit. In his *Assempri*, in the midst of a mass of dross and accumulations of the superstitions of the populace, he succeeds, through the deep sincerity and warmth of his mystic flame, in bringing before our mind's eye the golden treasure of a faith essentially rich in divine truth.

It has already been mentioned that the dominating vices in the flourishing and populous Siena of the thirteenth century were usury amongst the men, and the passion for "lisciarsi" (beautifying and painting themselves) among the women, and Fra Filippo's hatred of both vices was implacable. He quaintly describes in one famous *Assempro* how "the Devil, disguising himself as a waiting maid, blackened most horribly a woman's face instead of making her look more beautiful; how a beautiful young girl's painted face was pitted all over; and how another woman was shrivelled up in her clothes."

To edify and encourage those few who did not give way to these vanities he speaks of a good young woman

who, refusing to paint herself "saw in the consecrated Host the face of a child surrounded with splendour." There are also "two moral Assempri," in which the fraticello instructs the good men how they should chastise and correct their women folk when they paint and daub their faces. But it appears that certain husbands did not disapprove of this vanity on the part of their wives, certainly not Cecco Angiolieri, who wrote:—

Quando mia donna esce la man' dal letto
Che non s'ha posto ancor del fattibello,
Non ha nel mondo si laido vasello
Che, lungi lei, non paresse un diletto,
Cosi ha il viso di bellezze netto;
Infin ch'ella non cerne al buratello
Biacca, allume, scagliola o bambagello;
Pare a vedere un seguo maledetto!
Ma rifassi d'un liscio smisurato
Che non è uom che la veggia in chell'ora
Ch'ella no' l' faccia di sé innamorato.

(This husband says that when his wife gets up in the morning her ugliness is frightful, but after using powder, astringents, pumice stone, daubing paint on her cheeks with a piece of linen and using other artificial aids, there is no man who, seeing her, would not at once become enamoured of her.)

Had these lines of Cecco Angiolieri, or even a faint echo of them reached the ears of Fra Filippo, they would have sounded like the voice of a demon; and yet Fra Filippo was not able to silence these poets, for when Angiolieri died there were others who composed sonnets equally disturbing to the peace, not only of private families, but of the nuns in the convents, and while Fra Filippo was writing his *Assempri*, and Bernardino

was preaching to a great concourse of the faithful in the Piazza, there could be heard along the streets of the city the singing of verses[1] which an anonymous poet describes as the sentiments of gay young nuns who had escaped from the thraldom of the cloisters:

Fanciullette semplicelle
Pure, sciocche, nei primi anni
Fummò fatte monacelle:
Con lusinghe e con inganni
Ci vestiron questi panni.

(These simple little girls, in their foolishness when young had became nuns and being deluded and deceived had donned the dress of the convent.)

Some of their youthful companions had meanwhile been married, and the contrast between the two lives is thus described:

L'una è sempre in doglia e in pianto,
L'altra è sempre in gioco e festa,
L'una ha il vezzo e il ricco manto,
L'altra il bigio e il velo in testa:
Questo tempo che ci resta
Non vogliam perderlo al tutto,
Ma per trarne qualche frutto,
Noi vogliamo esser dotate!

(One is always sad and weeping,
One spends days in joy and feasting,
One is clad in veil and mourning,
One in rich and jewelled clothing:
On the time which still remains
We have also certain claims,
We shall ask them for a dowry
So that we can also marry.)

[1] *Canzonieri Senesi della seconda metà del Quattrocento.* Arturo Ricci.

These lines betray the vice of vanity which Dante also ironically imputes to the Sienese men. That some of the women did lead vain useless lives seems to be confirmed by the following epigram found engraved on a mantelpiece of the Renaissance period:

Quid levius vento?	Flamen
Quid flamine?	Fumus
Quid fumo?	Mulier
Quid muliere?	Nihil

But this light idea of woman held by the men of the Renaissance, an idea essentially pagan, is very different from that based on the psychological study of so many of those noble Christian women whose lives were influencing Italian History, and especially Sienese History, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. For instance, that noble matron Madonna Onorata Saracini (whose life has been written by Ilicino), was, in 1547, one of a band of ladies who went out by the Porta Camullia to receive the Emperor Frederick III and his consort, Eleanora. Some of her friends reproved her for her simplicity of attire, and the reply she made was: "Their modesty is the only thing which the Sienese ladies can make a display of, because women of richer cities could easily surpass them in feminine adornments," a reply which seems the only dignified one on the lips of this lovely patrician, whose description has come down to us through Ilicino: "Splendid large black eyes, perfect oval face, marvellous golden hair."

She was perhaps one of those beautiful women who have been introduced by Pinturicchio into his picture of the *cortége* of Piccolomini in the Duomo, women who were held in such high esteem by the mystics, as examples

of virtue and moral purity—women who were not asked to leave the outside world, or to suffer mortification in a vain or too austere asceticism. They were encouraged to marry and become worthy mothers of families, and thus make exemplary citizens who worked for the consolidation and prosperity of the republic.

CHAPTER III

Popular Superstitions

FRA FILIPPO was naturally even more severe in his tirades against the sins of avaricious men—the "fleecers" of the people, than he was against the vanity and weakness of women. In his *Assempri* usurers nearly always died miserably and without hope. For that matter the Church also condemned severely those offenders against the highest Christian precept—that of Charity. In 1179, under the pontificate of Alessandro III, the Lateran Council had prescribed: *Ut usurarii manifesti nec ad Communionem admittantur Altaris, nec Christianam, si in hoc peccato decesserint, accipiant sepulturam.*

This decree was confirmed in 1274 by the second General Council of Lyons, and thus legalises canonically the violent words used by Fra Filippo in the fifty-third *Assempro*. Speaking of the dead bodies of usurers he writes: "And these corpses should be buried in the ditch with dogs and with the beasts; not in churches or holy places."

The contrast between the luxury and irreligion of the rich bankers and usurers and the poverty and fervent mysticism of nearly all the people in those days is so great as to be hardly credible.

Fra Filippo tells us of one of these usurers who loved to make a great show of his wealth. "He went about *abbottonato d'ariento contraffaccendo tutti i frutti dell'anno*, that is to say he had on his clothes buttons of silver, fashioned according to the fruits of the season." "This same man, when he sat down to meals, used on his table as a saltcellar a golden cart, with the oxen and driver all

complete—besides which to make a further show of his wealth, he placed above the table fourteen little bags containing fourteen thousand gold ducats, which made a tinkling noise as they twirled around, and these he named, one Jesus Christ; another the Virgin Mary; and the others the twelve Apostles." But "judgment overtook him." . . . "He died miserably, and his body could not find peace in an honourable grave. His heir, who had made preparations to bury him in a chapel, found that the night before the funeral was to take place all the demons of Hell came around the church with so much fury and so loud a noise—such a storm and knocking that nobody was able to sleep. And in the morning it was found that the church where the body was awaiting burial had been cast into a river which was close by."

In all the descriptions, Filippo shows a marvellous gift of bringing the essential facts before the eyes of the reader with a kind of dramatic force. One of the best examples is the fifty-eighth *Assempro*.

"A man being in want of money sold himself to the Devil. Having given the sum required to the man the Devil disappeared, and the man went his way. Some time afterwards the man went with his wife for a walk to one of his meadows. As soon as he entered into the field he saw coming towards him in the distance the man with whom he had made his bargain, and whom he knew to be the Devil. Fear took hold upon him and he trembled and shivered and got paler and paler. His poor wife who was not in the secret asked why he was so frightened. And then he told her the story, and that the Devil was coming to claim payment. The wife said, 'Oh poor unhappy wretch, why didst thou not tell me this before, so that thou mightest have confessed thy fault.'

By this time the Devil had approached, and saying: 'Thou art mine, body and soul, come with me,' he clutched the wretched man by the arms, whereupon the wife took hold of her husband's legs and held them, but the Devil, being stronger, dragged both him and the wife a good bit along the meadow, so that the wife, who could not hold him any longer had to let him go. The Devil then carried the man so high up into the air, that the poor woman could not see him; and bearing away his soul he let his body fall down to earth."

How really marvellous appears to us the faith of these thirteenth century men, who were neither astonished nor doubted in the least the impossibility of such facts, and who could, in good faith, having related this anecdote, add their own testimony by saying that Fra Filippo had "heard this from a man worthy of belief, who had heard it from a Brother, who had confessed the wife—yes—he heard it from her herself."

And it is precisely this faith in the marvellous that gives us the key to a better understanding of the world of art, and of the spiritual sentiments of the Sienese in the thirteenth century.

Through Fra Filippo we are also introduced into a strange world of popular beliefs and superstitions raised to the rank of domestic truth which survive even to this day in the families of the country folk. They have been handed on from one generation to another, flourishing anew all the time on the roots of the ancient pagan religion, although impregnated with the mysticism of the new faith. These old beliefs remain faithfully twined to the oldest traditions, like ivy to ancient ruins, and they will never die until the peasants shall have renounced, together with their picturesque old-time costumes, much of their spiritual armour.

Modern civilisation will necessarily hasten this transformation, and it is very interesting to find that even after five hundred years there still survive around Siena certain precepts mentioned by Fra Filippo in his *Assempri*; for in the pure and simple faith found in some of the patriarchal families, curious scruples and superstitions exist.

A good housewife remarked one day that she had never baked her bread on Sunday, as some accident would certainly have happened to it. The reason for this conviction may be found in the forty-eighth *Assempro*, where mention is made of a woman who "baked her bread on Sunday, and when she went to take it out of the oven found it turned to blood." The good housewife certainly knew nothing of the *Assempro*, but she added: "Bread baked on Sunday would not be eaten even by beasts." And Fra Filippo five hundred years ago wrote: "If you take bread baked on a Sunday, carry some of it to a fishpond, and throw some of the crumbs of the bread into the pond, you will see that not a single fish will take a single crumb!"

There also survives the faith in witch-doctors and quack-doctors among many of the peasant families, a faith much stronger than any they place in the best doctors who, possessing high diplomas gained in the universities of Italy, practise their profession in Siena!

Both Fra Filippo and S. Bernardino warned people against this belief in witchcraft, because they saw in the treatment the incantations of the Devil, never human quackery. In the sixteenth *Assempro* we read: "Many childish fools instead of going for help for their different ailments to the natural doctors, and to the servants of God, go rather for counsel and aid to cursed fortune-tellers and sorcerers, believing that what God does not

wish to do, the devils of Hell can; thus bringing upon themselves the justice of God, for they are deceived by the Devil, as they justly deserve."

But it was not only the "childish fools" who had faith in the "cursed fortune-tellers." The Governors of the Commune believed in talismans,[1] and it has already been seen how these men of authority had recourse on various occasions to Guido Bonatti, and how in the University there was a Chair of Astrology. From a rare book of the fourteenth century, which is preserved in the Communal Library of Siena, a book entitled *Libro di Astrologia o Sfera*, we find what kind of teaching was given by the Professor of Astrology.

The different influences of the signs of the Zodiac were seriously discussed, also how to interpret dreams, according to the phases of the moon. They divided the lunar month in this way:—

On the first, Adam was born, and it was a day "good to terminate or settle, sell, and navigate."

On the second, Eve was born: "And the child born on this day will grow quickly and be fortunate, the sick will be cured. . . ."

But on the fifth day, when Cain made his offering to God: "The theft will not be discovered: he who falls ill will soon die or have a cruel illness, and he who escapes will not return!"

The almanacs were naturally compiled so as to correspond to the divinations of astrology, and, as at that time a breeze of sympathy with the Ghibellines was blowing in Siena, we read such a prophecy as this: "While the Court of Rome remains in Italy there will never be good peace

[1] Tomasi (*Histoire lib. IX*, p. 223, says that in the foundations of the Torre del Mangia were placed stones: "Telesemata," with Greek, Latin, and Hebrew letters to insure against "percussions" of arrows and "concussions" of storms and thunder.

among Christians." If a man contemplated taking a journey he could read in his almanac: "Travel just as thou pleasest, but be careful to clothe thyself in the Gospel of St. John, because a certain spirit is thine enemy."

The following are some examples of the medical prescriptions:—

A Cure for Sleeplessness.—"Take a knife and write on it the names of the Seven Sleepers, place it under the head of the sufferer—he will sleep well."

To drive away Tertian Fever.—"Write down three names followed by three signs of a cross, or as an alternative, cut a fruit into three unequal parts and eat these; and while fasting write these two formulae: *Pater par est; filius vita est.* At the same time a little boy and girl must recite three Paters and three Aves."

There was often written on the margin of the page the quaint expression: "This has been proved," as if to silence any sceptics.

The Commune consulted not only the astrologers but also the sorcerers and wizards, as shown in the Books of Biccherna[1], and nearly always to charge them to scatter noxious powders among their Florentine enemies! These powders were generally manipulated by women, and placed in leathern pockets and glass phials. In these account-books of Biccherna we find how these powders were made. The rite had to be performed at night. A marmot was sacrificed, when special sacrificial knives of a strange pattern had to be used. Boys and young girls assisted at the ceremony carrying small basins, and performing certain offices. As before mentioned, the powder was carefully collected, in order to bring about some evil when scattered in the Florentine camp.

[1] Arch. di Stato in Siena (A.S.S. Vol II. c.). Item xx, sol, domine Galiene Gualenghi pro faciminis que fecit in exercitu florentinorum. "Item iiij lib. Buonaiunte plebis sancti Leonini pro quodam pulvere qui proiecit in exercitum florentinorum."

Ludovico Zdekauer, in his "Lecture on the Public Life of the Sienese in the twelfth century"[1] affirms that the Church did nothing to prevent such errors, adding that, in fact, they were encouraged, and as evidence of this he quotes only one document of 1229, which refers to a case of exorcism.

But, on the other hand, we find that the Archbishop, Buonfiglio Ugurgieri, condemns these practices in his Constitutions, *Quod nullus Clericus aliquas divinationes faciat*,[2] and we know that all the Sienese from Fra Filippo to S. Bernardino opposed themselves might and main to both astrologers and soothsayers.

The mediæval Church fought against magic, although acknowledging the Pythagorean Science of Numbers, that inspired the holy Fathers Barnaba, Ireneo, Clemente Alessandrino, and Eusebio da Cesarea. S. Agostino looked upon numbers as "Thoughts of God." He believed that each number had its providential significance. "Divine Wisdom" he says, "is recognised in the numbers stamped on everything."[3]

Magic was in the days of Fra Filippo closely allied to the science of Necromancy, which had many points of contact with the worst forms of modern spiritualism. The spirits were evoked, not simply to assuage human troubles, but more especially to satisfy the keen curiosity of mortals who desired to penetrate into the darkness of the future. Il Villani narrates in his *Cronica*, that Provenzano Salvani, the victor of Monteaperto, always carried about with him a "demon shut up in a phial, most tame and obedient to his desires and commands, in whom he had the greatest faith, and esteemed highly." The captain of the Florentines had always his "familiar,"

[1] Page 73. Tip. Lazzeri, 1879.
[2] Pecci, *Storia del Vescovado di Siena* (Lucca, 1748), p. 210.
[3] Comp. *Quaestio in Heptateuch* (De Musica).

and in the Battle of Monteaperto carried one of these mysterious spirits most carefully and affectionately "shut up in a lampolla." We have no account of the relations existing between him and his familiar after the rout of the Florentine army!

Fra Filippo recounts the story of a young girl he knew in Siena who was in great danger because of the incantations used by her mother, when invoking the aid of the Devil to discover the authors of certain thefts: "She had a glass filled with water placed on the ground, both mother and daughter sitting down near it. Then the mother told the girl to recite certain diabolical words over the water, having done which, the Devil appeared in the water in the form and clothes of the person or persons who had committed the theft, and even showed in what way it had been committed and where the booty had been hidden!"

In times when the city had no police the services of a demon detective must have been very useful, and to the woman certainly a little mine of wealth.

In contrast to these methods used by necromancers we turn to another of Fra Filippo's most delightful *Assempri*, one so pervaded with Franciscan simplicity that it is worthy of being quoted at length. It tells us how the Prior of Lecceto dealt with a thief.

"At that time a very holy and venerable Brother Bandino was Prior of the Convent of Selva del Lago, and it happened during the time of silence at mid-day, when all the brothers were in their cells, that he saw a thief stealing the ass from its usual place, and taking it away. Instead of breaking the silence or allowing the brothers to break it, he let the thief leave with the ass, but he himself went into the church, and knelt before the Table of the Saviour, where he prayed to God for that

thief, that he should return and confess his sin in penitence and so save his soul.

"The thief and the ass were near the end of the Selva, when all at once, at the gateway, the ass stopped as if turned into stone, fixed to the ground, and nothing would make it move. Then the thief, fearing he might be overtaken, decided to leave the ass and get out of the grounds as soon as possible, but the air around him seemed like a thick wall, preventing him going a step further. He then began to feel great compunction for what he had done, and made solemn vows to God and to the Virgin Mary, that if he were permitted to leave that spot, he would return to the Monastery, and restore the ass to the Prior, and would from that moment amend and correct his life. As soon as the man had made this vow, the ass of its own accord rose up and started to return homewards, while the thief felt that the air around him was light and pure and he himself quite free. Walking behind the ass, and coming to the Monastery, he asked for the Prior, that is, the Blessed Frate Bandino, to whom he restored the ass, and with many tears acknowledging his sin, asked for pardon, telling the Prior of the miracle which had caused him to return. Frate Bandino not only pardoned him, but also made him a present of much alms, and with great love and much charity he admonished him, and begged him never again to do evil, but to amend his life, which the man promising to do, he sent him away in peace."

There are to be found in this marvellously fresh and vivid anecdote certain mystic and artistic touches that can only be compared with the picture of the grand Sienese painter, Stefano di Giovanni, better known as Sassetta. In it we find Fra Filippo under an aspect of unusual sweetness, we might nearly say of a new humanity;

not that of the austere hermit, but rather of an ardent spiritual brother of St. Catherine of Siena.

We could imagine the good Bandino, "who gave alms to the thief and sent him away in peace" living in a sunny Umbrian cloister, and not in the dull, dark Lecceto, encircled with walls as in a fortress, and occupied by images of a thousand devils.

This *Assempro* seems to us as if it were a flower gathered from the mystic meadow over which the Poverello walked, awakening to life the unknown "flora" of an Umbrian spring. And in fact, a new Franciscan spring *was* about to burst forth in Siena, pervading by its spirit all the Italy of the Renaissance; and opposing a splendid mystic and human re-action to the resurrected Paganism, against which the crude asceticism of Savonarola fought in vain.

Part III.

CHAPTER I

Giovanni Colombini

A FEW miles from Siena, outside the Porta San Marco, there can still be seen the walls of the very old convent of Santi Abbundio and Abbundanzio, which was inhabited for centuries by Benedictine nuns, and is now popularly known as the Monastery of "Santa Bonda."

On the top of the roof of the house there blossoms every year a wild olive tree, planted there by a nun, who, according to the legend, was so afraid of losing her soul that she wished to convince herself of salvation by some absolute proof. Taking a small branch of olive, she stuck it in among the tiles, thinking to herself: "If it takes root it is a sign that God will save my soul."

The merciful Lord God did not permit this peaceful abode to be disturbed by the despair of that poor virgin, and, in fact, the olive *did* take root, flourishing in the air like a symbol of hope.

The ancient monastery is reached by a winding road, between pleasant hills which are covered with vines and olives, and continue further on to dominate the valleys of "Arbia" and "Orcia" as far as the mountains of San Fiora.

In 1810 the nuns were obliged to leave the old house, because the Napoleonic Law suppressed first of all the convents; and now, for over a hundred years, desolation

reigns in that cloister, sanctified by so many womanly prayers, and where Madonna Paola Foresia and her companions, on the 2nd of August in the year 1376, buried with tears of love the body of their friend, Giovanni Colombini,[1] who had left a Will in which he expressed a desire to be buried within the precincts of the convent and cloister of Santi Abbundio and Abbundanzio. He had added that he wished to be borne there after his death "on the back of an ass, wrapped in a rough piece of canvas, with his hands tied behind him," a symbol of poverty.

This last desire was naturally contrary to the wishes of his many friends and also of the people of Siena, who would not consent to it, for they had already venerated him as a Saint—that is—a *Triumphator vitae*.

As the last thoughts of St. Francis of Assisi went to re-kindle eternal hope in the cloisters of San Damiano, so the last heart-beats of Colombini throb spiritually among the poor walls of Santa Bonda.

In these days nobody seeks out the old hermitage, for it offers no precious artistic remains before which the delicate æsthetic snobbery of modern pilgrims can show its enthusiasm.

The little fourteenth century church appeared even too modest to the Benedictines of the eighteenth century, for they built by the side of it a pretentious companion church, with altars, richly adorned with stucco, and this is still used for worship, whilst that which gave hospitality to the body of Colombini (before it was taken to the "Carmine" of Siena) seems to have been transformed into a vat room. In this ancient church—bound together by a common ideal—Madonna Foresia and Giovanni Colombini were wont to offer up their prayers to God; and on the altar

[1] See Illustration.

in the centre, Giovanni, the founder of the "Gesuati," vowed to God his little daughter Agnes, and soon after, his friend Vincenti brought there his own daughter, to bear her company.

These unique mystical souls would not have considered their renunciation of the world complete, had they not perpetuated it in their own children; had they not helped them to escape from the hated world—the empire of Satan—so as to leave no trace of themselves in his dominions.

Modern folk are unable to understand these acts of apparently hurtful interference with the individual liberty of others; and many may judge them severely; ignoring the fact that what they did was inspired by a faith which made them believe that they were acting in love, to secure a certainty of salvation for those dear to them.

But it would be useless to try to justify actions arising out of sentiments which are extinct in too many hearts; it is easier and better for us to try to make alive and bring before our eyes those heroic and sublime deeds which we find in the lives of these mystics, although we may have to seek them in the midst of what appears to us absurd and unjust.

After all, does not real heroism nearly always drive men to do things which border on the seemingly absurd? William Blake said that "men can never arrive at wisdom, unless they have first passed through the castle of Folly."

All the true mystics lived in the castle of Folly—of the divine folly of a dream which transfigured to them every creature and every thing, and made all who came into contact with them feel the strength and beauty of their souls.

CHAPTER II

Giovanni Colombini and the Gesuati

COLOMBINI was born in 1304, of an old and respected Sienese family. He held with dignity the office of "Priore del Comune," as others of his family had already done. His father, Pietro, had been employed in some of the highest offices of the Commune, and was a person of considerable means.

Colombini's youth had been spent in the splendid gay life of the city, among the other young nobles who loved arms, and who used to ride their fiery steeds along the narrow streets of Siena calling out the "Salva! Salva!" prescribed in the decrees of the Signoria, riding through the crowds of people who, although alarmed, were wont to gaze admiringly at their bold young nobles, of whom they were very proud.

He was greatly esteemed in Siena, not only because of his intelligence, but because of the wealth which he had inherited, wealth which he had afterwards increased considerably by his own exertions.

According to the custom of the time, as soon as he was old enough he had chosen a profession, and became a member of the "Arte della Lana." He established important banks in Perugia, San Giovan d'Asso and Castello della Val d'Orcia. He was a landowner and loved money, pomp, and all the panoply of a young noble's life, just as the young Francis of Assisi did before his conversion.

Colombini resembled the Saint of Assisi in many ways. They both underwent a complete revolution of spirit;

their mission was purely a lay mission; they had the same contempt for honours and riches; their high respect for womanly friendship in religion was identical, and they were both possessed of the same fervent spirit of charity and of respect for ecclesiastical jurisdiction. This latter spirit of submission to authority was in contrast to those "heretical" sects of Rome which did homage to poverty, not so much for the sake of self-sacrifice as for the sake of pride in their poverty[1], which they paraded like a flag of rebellion.

This "Gesuati" movement was like that of the primitive Franciscan movement, remarkable for the perfect joy and gladness which was expressed in their songs of divine love; spontaneous and full of passionate feeling, examples of which are found in the hymns of Jacopone da Todi and Bianco da Siena.

This spirit of mystic joy in grief and in sufferings, joined to an active life of good works, so different from that passive state of Job who cursed his condition—this spirit, like the sun in spring, did not arrive at its full splendour in Siena until towards the second half of the fourteenth century, when Catherine of Siena and Colombini appeared amongst all the horrors of the pestilence.

. . . . . .

Feo Belcari, in *La Vita del B. Colombini da Siena*, describes him as "a man of nice kind expression and short, slight build," and Sano da Pietro, in a picture to be found

[1] It has not yet been observed how the sincere love of poverty is the privilege of the rich. True lovers of poverty like St. Francis and Colombini and others like them were members of well-to-do families. It is in these men more than in those who come from poor families that we find generous and sincere sentiments. Everybody loves that which has cost him some sacrifice, some renunciation; one who has been born in poverty, to whom it represents a natural condition of life, can only look upon such a state with indifference, disgust or resignation.

in the "Belle Arti" shows him kneeling with hands joined together in an attitude of prayer,[1] absorbed in spiritual communion, and wearing the white robe of the "Gesuati." The reason why Colombini, in the midst of his honours, wealth and ease, and no longer young, turned his back on the world and was converted, can be better understood after a brief description of the civil and religious state of the Sienese Republic about this time.

During the second part of the fourteenth century, Siena was subject to bitter trials. The memorable plague of 1384 dealt a sudden blow to her political success, which at this time was very great. Her second "Magistrato dei Nove" (of which Colombini formed a part) was directing affairs with much wisdom and ability, when unfortunately, on March the 24th, 1385, the Government was overthrown by a trick on the part of the Ghibelline faction, when the Emperor Charles IV was allowed to enter the city.

There then followed an epoch of renewed discord and civil disorders, which put a stop to many of the aspirations and projects of the people. The Sienese had ever since 1339 cherished a dream of making their Cathedral the most superb in all Italy, but this idea they were now compelled to abandon, and there can still be seen the gigantic marble vestiges of what had been started, vestiges which seem to be challenging both sky and Time. During these years, bands of adventurers, taking advantage of the city's misfortunes, often entered and ravaged it with fire and sword, but the most cruel enemy was the plague, which from 1348 re-appeared five times, making a massacre of the citizens, so that the years 1363, 1374, 1400, 1411, and 1424 saw Siena in

[1] See Illustration.

THE BLESSED GIOVANNI COLOMBINI, SANO DI PIETRO.
Lombardi.

the throes of a terrible struggle for existence. Of the chroniclers of this time, Agnolo di Tura and Neri di Donato have given us the most realistic pictures of this deadly pestilence. During these terrible years, when suffering and oppression was the common lot of all the Sienese, the best of the citizens gave themselves to a renewal and purification of their faith in God, and so raised the tone of their spiritual life, that a bright light seemed to glow in Siena, irradiating not only the city itself, but spreading all over Italy its spiritual splendour; and the soul of the people, like a wounded eagle, soared upwards towards Heaven, finding expression for its deep passion in that supreme lyric exaltation found in the hymns of joy and grief sung by Bianco da Siena.

During the thirteenth century, when the city had enjoyed so much prosperity, the artists had unfolded the wonders of their works in the world of art, being precursors of the Florentines. But now all this was changed —Florence, becoming richer and stronger, was nearing the dawn of the birth of her artistic greatness with Masaccio, while Siena, suffering and broken, fixed her artistic soul on a great religious conception of the world around her. She quenched her thirst with her tears and lived on the daily bread of pain.

Only those who have lived in the religious atmosphere of the Mystics can hope to understand the Sienese art of the fifteenth century. The Florentines at that time were superior to the Sienese in their logical and acute methods of reasoning; but it is not for their intellectual talents and artistic gifts that one admires the Sienese of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but for the possession of an inexhaustible treasure of inherited depth of feeling, the perfect beauty of their heroic temperament, and their tenacity of purpose and stedfast adherence to a truth.

They were always opposed to any vain enthusiasm or passing elation, even of the smallest and least expected nature. . . .

Let us think for a while of the mystic influence which worked on the soul of Colombini, of a merchant, that is, of a man devoted to money-making and to the enjoyment of worldly pleasures; enabling him to enter so thoroughly into the soul struggle of Santa Maria Egiziaca that he made a complete change in his own mode of living. Of course reading of the conversion of the Saint was not the precise cause; for some such resolution must have been maturing in his mind before. But this was the crisis. And these crises always occur to mystic minds, which are so sensitive that a spark suffices to light up the fire of their enthusiasm into heroic actions. No action worthy of being called heroic has ever been performed after a process of cold reasoning, or as a result of abstract ideas promulgated by moralists and philosophers. It is always depth of feeling in the heart which gives that life and strength to ideas, so as to change them into heroic and self-sacrificing lives.

One day, Colombini's wife Biagia had given him a book of legends, in which he read the life of Santa Maria Egiziaca; a woman who, like himself, had lived a life of ease and pleasure, a second Magdalene who "had drawn so many to a spiritual death," and who "having been immersed in grace and love" had desired to "die alone, austerely on the sands of the desert, dry and warm as were her poor bones."

Colombini must have felt a strange thrill of sympathy and compassion while reading of the soul-struggle of this poor and yet glorious woman; for he also had spent the best years of his life in the pursuit of pleasure and the heaping up of riches, and the time had come, when, like

the legendary Santa Maria, he felt that bitter disgust which remorse instils in every heart that longs for goodness when it finds it has mistaken artificial for true happiness.

Whether it was the plague of 1348, with its devastation, or whether it was disillusion on matters of politics, which taught him the lesson of the eternal mysteries, one cannot say, we only know that he asserted how God had "shown him and made him know, that the whole world dreamt and raved, and that human life was just like smoke and wind that passed by, and that he who gathered most of earthly goods found in them the worst market."

He then passed through a phase, strange but true, that all real conversions lead men to pass through—although we must observe that it is very rare to find conversions of persons of over fifty manifesting themselves in actions.

He was now as deeply in love with what he had at one time despised, as he was disgusted with what he had once enjoyed. Poverty became for him synonymous with riches, and riches with poverty. The soul—hitherto an unacknowledged guest—became the monarch of his house. Wishing to humiliate himself to the same extent that he had been honoured by his country; and having for two months, when "Priorato," been treated in the Palazzo Pubblico with much servility and obsequiousness by others, he now, for two months, in the same Palazzo, subjected himself to the performance of the most humble duties.

When his old friends recognised him one day in the lowest part of the Campo, on an ass, with bare feet, bareheaded, and wearing a narrow gown and short cape of coarse patched cloth, they exclaimed that he was mad. Hearing this, he admonished them with the words: *Fate bene del pazzo quanto potete e sarete savi. Cristo vi*

faccia impazzare che non c'è di meglio, alluding to St. Paul's injunction to the Corinthians: "Let him become a fool that he may be wise, and may Christ make you fools." And in fervour of spirit he added: *Povertà, povertà, il tuo linguaggio non s'intende. Viva la santa povertà nei nostri cuori.* (Poverty, poverty, thy speech is not understood, may holy poverty live in our hearts.)

Most of his friends still continued to mock him, but a few joined themselves to him, the first being Francesco Vincenti, member of a noble Sienese family.

This small company, all laymen, and for the most part members of rich and aristocratic families, were absolutely democratic in sentiment; and this fact, which was in striking contrast to the haughtiness and arrogance of their wealthy relations, gained for them at once the favour of the populace.

At San Giovan d'Asso, where Colombini owned some lands which he had presented to the poor, this extraordinary Christian Socialist of the fourteenth century told his companions one day to bind him with a rope, and drag him along the road, enjoining on them to beat and ill-treat him, and to say to the onlookers: "See, this is the man who wished to starve you people by giving you bad, rotten grain, all worm-eaten, and wanted to charge you a florin for a bushel of the good. He is a wicked man, a hater of the poor. Beat him well, people! Beat him well!"

Colombini seemed to be somewhat theatrical with these loud and vulgar scenes, with the flagellations, insults, and reproaches in which he liked to indulge, but his idea was to debase and destroy any privilege which his own class enjoyed to the exclusion of the people, and thus bring about a perfect democracy; so if we consider him under this aspect, he appears to be the representative

type of that movement among the mystics of Siena which was at the same time anarchical *and* religious, a movement which was creeping its way into the religious worship of the various sects of the "Fraticelli"[1] and which both the civil and ecclesiastical authorities did their best to suppress.

Colombini felt that while he humiliated himself in such a terrible way, he was also humiliating a principle. There was a most delicate and pungent irony concealed in his great and loving heart; for in thus humiliating himself he was levelling the highest and most powerful citizens of Siena, the nobles of his own family, to the height of the humblest and most unfortunate plebeian.

This is certainly the way in which his actions were considered by the rulers of the Commune, who, in 1363, condemned both Colombini and his friend Francesco Vincenti to perpetual panishment from their native city.

The accusation brought against him was: "that he was a dangerous innovator, who might ruin the peace of families and cause a rebellion amongst the populace.[2]" This ban of exile was one of the most severe punishments which could be inflicted on a Sienese citizen, for his goods were seized and confiscated; he could neither inherit nor bequeath; and his enemies might kill him with impunity. The Public Crier of the Signoria announced the ban in all the piazze; an accredited official of the Commune placed a lighted candle at the entrance of one of the gates, and if the condemned person had not left the city before the candle had burnt down he was put to death.

On the day when Colombini and Vincenti left for their exile twenty-five other "Gesuati" accompanied them, all

[1] Fraticelli: humble lay brothers who formed sects after the Order of St. Francis of Assisi.

[2] Tommasi MS., cit. A. iv, 3, p. 59.

filled with that passion of sacrifice which is felt by those forced to leave their country. They went to the city of Arezzo. After their departure the people showed themselves violently antagonistic to the sentence of exile, and, as in the meantime an epidemic had broken out quite suddenly, many saw in this a visitation of God; so that the Commune, in face of the tumult of the people, was very soon compelled not only to revoke the sentence of banishment, but also to send an ambassador praying the "Gesuati" to return.

Colombini received with grateful heart the message of the Commune, but replied that: "the Lord was now calling him to other places," and he did not return to his native city until 1356, just one year prior to his death.

CHAPTER III

Giovanni Colombini and Paola Foresia

IN order to understand this religious reform in Sienese life, and to penetrate into its inner meaning, we must note that the first "Gesuati" armed themselves with a spirit of cynicism in order that they might strike with more force at the rich and the powerful. They demanded from their members, as one of their chief virtues, the courage to face and defy public opinion and the respect of the world. An ancient historian says that "the greater part of those admitted as 'Fraticelli' were in the habit of going to the Campo, and there, before the image of the Virgin Mary, they stripped off their rich robes, and re-clothed themselves in the vilest of garments, having wreaths of olive leaves on their heads. During this time two of their number sang devout praises to God. This and other things they did so as to humble themselves, and lay a perfect foundation for the spiritual building."

In these trials of faith Colombini tested and immersed the souls of his companions.

One touching episode stands out clearly as showing to what extent these proofs of faith must have tested some of his followers.

Nardusa, a young Sienese noble, scarcely twenty years of age, but already a "Maestro" in jurisprudence, heard Colombini say: "I have been able to observe that God works marvellous things through simple men and also through sinners, while He leaves the noble, the learned, the scientists and the wise in the frost and ice of their own science."

These words and the deep meaning underlying them, so touched Nardusa, that he determined to follow the ideals of the Gesuati. But as he loved life and was ambitious of success, with every hope of arriving at the height of his ambition, the proof he underwent must have been very painful. He was initiated into the band of the Gesuati in the Campo, and when his companions stripped from his back his rich scarlet tunic, and put on the worn and tattered robe which he was henceforth to wear, he is said to have blushed with shame and confusion. All around he could hear the Gesuati songs of rejoicing as the procession went on its way to the Cathedral. Passing through the streets he was recognised by the friends with whom he had spent the previous evening. In their splendid perfumed robes they looked disdainfully on their former companion, shouting after him words of scorn and derision. During this walk to the Cathedral, which was to him a calvary, his sufferings were so great that he afterwards confessed: "I suffered so much during that procession that I would have preferred to die." And indeed Colombini required that he should die to the world, so as to be reborn into his new life.

The beauty of great renunciations is very rarely understood in modern times. It is, however, quite true that to one who is in possession of everything, the only possible sacrifice is the renunciation of everything. It is the only way in which a soul may be re-born to a new life, it is a pruning at the very root of the tree, so that in the spring it may burst forth anew with fresh shoots and blossom abundantly.

The rules[1] of these mystic Sienese poverelli were very stern and harsh. Paolo Morigi in his *Paradiso dei*

[1] Comp. Baluzii *Miscellanea*, Tomo IV. Ordo et forma morum quos et per consuetudinem observat congregatio pauperum qui vulgariter Gesuati noncupantur.

Gesuati[1] thus describes the tenour of their lives: "Between day and night they continued in prayer for five or six hours (they prayed without raising their voices, but raising their souls to God, and they preferred the 'Our Father' to any other prayer).

"They did not say Mass, nor did they in their great humility accept Holy Orders. When they were reproached for this, they quoted the example of the Santissimo Marco Evangelista, who felt so unworthy that he cut off his thumb, in order to be excused from celebrating the Holy Mysteries. They also quoted the example of 'San Paolo primo Eremita'; of Antonio Monaco; of nearly all the ten thousand monks who, living in the monasteries of Thebes under the rule of Abbot Serapione, 'tilled the ground, redeemed those imprisoned for debt and did not say Mass.' "

The religious spirit which dominated the whole life of the primitive "Gesuati" family can be seen in the teaching of one of them, Antonio Bettini, from whose work, *Il Monte Santo di Dio*, are quoted the following rules for the guidance of a spiritual family life:—

"Let thy mother be holy compunction that is able to wash away the stains of thy sins.

"Thy brother, he who works with thee and admonishes thee.

"Thy wife, the thought of death with which thou dost go to bed, lie down, and get up.

"Thy dear children, the tears and sighs of thy heart.

"Thy servant, thy body.

"Thy friends are the holy virtues, who, if they will be true friends, can be good and useful to thee at the hour of thy death."

[1] P. Morigi, *Paradiso dei Gesuati*, Venezia, 1582.

These counsels are not new, they re-blossom from the roots of the ancient hermit life, and they could as easily have been given by one of the monks shut up in the sacred fortress of Lecceto as by the Gesuato Bettini. In order, therefore, to find the origin of that wonderful spirituality which inspired these Gesuati, we cannot do better than read the *Epistolario* of Colombini,[1] where we shall feel the strong, generous heart of the writer; the high tone of spirituality which pervades his sentiments; and the deep human affection underlying them. The two souls that influenced most powerfully the mind of Colombini from the first days of his conversion, flooding his will with their secret energy, were Pietro Petroni and Paola di Ghino.

Pietro Petroni is a typical figure of ancient Sienese mysticism. A member of one of the most noted patrician families, he went into the Hospital of the Scala at the age of fourteen to dedicate his life to the care of the sick. Later he entered the Monastery of the Certosa di Maggiano. He was ordained deacon, but out of humility cut off the index finger of his left hand so as to be unable to take his part in the celebration of the Divine Offices.

He was a man who could read the secrets of men's hearts, and was indirectly the instrument of the conversion of the old Boccaccio. He took a great interest in Colombini, whom he taught to spend certain portions of his days in silence and solitary meditation, when he could pour out his soul before God. Colombini entertained for him the greatest reverence and gratitude, and after his death he, together with Nicolao Vincenti, brother of Francesco his first follower, wrote a biography of Petroni.

[1] *Le lettere del B. Giovanni Colombini*, published by Adolfo Bartoli. Lucca, Tip. Balatresi, 1856.

Paola Foresia, Abbess of Santa Bondo, was a woman who, according to Tantucci, was "*Di spirito elevato, superiore al suo sesso*," and so energetic that in order to obtain a reform of rules in her Convent, she dared to go with another sister as far as Avignon, where Innocent VI then resided.

She was good with that goodness which is like a bright light emanating from beauty of soul, radiant with the fire of lofty thought, and she made Colombini feel how sweet is the bond of true, pure friendship with a good woman, to have in common the same high ideals of love, the same pure thoughts. Colombini found in Paola Foresia that which he could never have found in his good wife Biagia; that awakening in him of an heroic feeling, which, over-ruling all other sentiments, makes the life of a worthy man to become a sublime poem. He had lost his only son Pietro at the time he vowed his little daughter Agnes to a religious life, placing her under the care of Madonna Paola, and he fulfilled his vow of poverty by having a document drawn up by the notary, Francesco di Landa, in which he bequeathed all his earthly goods to his friend Paola, in favour of the Convent of Santa Bonda, with the stipulation that both she and her companions should always care for his wife Biagia, and all her household during their lives.

The *Epistolario* is a wonderful document, disclosing the high form of friendship which united these two great souls. The letters to Paola were preserved for centuries in Santa Bonda, and were nearly all written during Colombini's exile. By means of them we are able to re-construct his life during those years of vicissitudes, and to see how the Order grew and matured. We are also able to understand better than we could in the most complete biography, the spirit which animated this great Sienese mystic.

"Santa Bonda" stood to Colombini as his port of refuge and comfort, while the Certosa was that of meditation and discipline, and also of rigid penitence. When he or some companion felt more than usually oppressed by worldly misunderstanding; or bowed down by humility; or overflowing with joy and love in their souls; it was their custom to go and pour out their feelings, sad or joyful, into the hospitable and ever welcoming heart of Madonna Foresia and the other sisters who lived in the hermitage; and it may indeed be said that Santa Bonda was the home of all the hopes of the first "Gesuati Poverelli." Colombini spent his best hours there, frequently gathering together his friends to a spiritual feast. Writing of one such feast a friend says: "You must know that on Saturday morning there was at Santa Bonda the 'Maestro' of Logic and many others, there were eight 'brothers,' and both they and we were so filled with spiritual joy that the 'brothers' said to us that Christ had indeed been with us." Very often, when writing to his followers, Colombini speaks with devout affection of his "sisters" at Santa Bonda. He says to Giovanni d'Ambrogio and Messer Niccoli: "Love one another, sing and make feasts and be joyful. Be both obedient and reverend towards Madonna Paola. May Christ dwell in your hearts. Pray always for us, as we do for you. I will not write more. May Christ make both you and us fools for the sake of His Love." And in another letter: "Pray God for the mothers of the poor, for those who do works of charity, the women of Santa Bonda, who so miraculously endure fatigue; praying for everybody; and do ye pray for them, and be valiant, strong and constant."

By thus reminding them of these heroic women he stimulated his followers to strong ideals, uniting them together in prayer. He never ceased recommending

them to be strong in love Divine, constant in their Faith, humble in spirit and to live in concord.

To Giovanni d'Ambrogio and his companions he writes: "Speak of love, and thirst for it. . . . Minuccio (a deserter), because he desired to have his own way, left the brothers without saying a word. . . . Have compassion on him and pray for him. May Christ guard him. . . . All this happened to him because he would not listen to the advice of his brethren. . . . Vanni will tell you the facts. . . . It grieved me very much. . . . Christ help us. . . . I shall go where He leads me. . . . I hope to return soon. May Christ watch over you and over me."

In the letters of Colombini we see the anxiety of a soldier who feels, when faced with the task imposed upon him, how little of life is left for him to do his work well. He never wastes time on useless or superfluous words. He speaks of even the most intensive emotions in one incisive sentence—not enlarging on them, but rather trying to subdue them. His exhortations, far from being sermons, sound like the orders of a captain to his men in battle. Before St. Catherine's time he wrote these wonderful words:

> "Temptations are life, the crown of our soul.
> Do not let temptations alarm us,
> Let us await them with joy,
> Let us sustain them with fortitude;
> For gold is refined by fire, and is made perfect;
> He who refuses to fight is already vanquished."

When he writes to Madonna Paola of the spiritual conquests of the "Gesuati" he always employs a soldier's language. Writing about his friend Vincenti, he says: "Francesco has put to rout all Monticchiello through the

preaching of Christ, and is considered mad." Nothing gives him more joy than a victory over souls; and he never forgets to inform his friend of it. Here are fragments of a letter addressed to this same friend: "Giovanni and Conte met a man of Arcidosso who was going to Rome to keep an inn, they brought him here, and through the grace of the Crucified Christ he has given his all to the poor, his all; which amounted to a good eight hundred 'libbre,' he gave it all up, and now lives amongst us—poor. He used to be a cruel murderous man, but now he has quite a pleasant appearance.

"When we were at Montalcino telling them about our beloved Christ, all at once the whole place was shaken with a fervour of emotion, and there was much weeping and tears, but it would take too long to tell you everything. By the infinite goodness of God, many men and women have turned to Him and arrived at that point that they have given up all their wealth, and embraced the riches of poverty. . . .

"Lorino has greatly changed and, by the grace of God, in the presence of our Father the Bishop, he willingly gave both pardon and peace to those three of the "Piccogliuomini' who caused the death of his uncle, Messer Lorino, a pardon which he would not have given, according to what he once said, for thousands of florins."

CHAPTER IV

Giovanni Colombini—The Poverelli Gesuati

THE fervour of spirit of these new apostles seemed to bring to life again the soul of the "Poverello" of Assisi. What saddened them more than anything, was to see themselves accused by many of being heretics, and to know that also the Pope, Urban V, seemed to credit this. The Ecclesiastical Court at Avignon was implacable in its dislike of these "fraticelli," as they were called, and although away in France, the Curia Avignonesa kept strict watch on all new forms of belief.

It was, as before mentioned, as dangerous innovators that they were banished from Siena. Shortly after, in Arezzo, one of them, Ser Biliatto, was hanged as a heretic. We know this from the ninety-first letter (of the Bartoli edition) sent by Vincenti to the nuns of Santa Bonda. In another letter, Vincenti, when trying to soothe the feelings of these nuns, says: "But think that so much is the error of the people that they are unable to believe that we are pure and well-meaning. When they realise the truth we shall be much loved and trusted; they will believe that we do all things well and virtuously, and by that we shall be much helped, for although we fear that there must be much fighting, we hope it will end in a victory for us according to our holy desires. . . . We shall be contented with whatever God wishes for us."

In these epistolary fragments we can discern the state of mind in which the "Gesuati" found themselves on the eve of that day when they had to present themselves before the Pope Urban V, who had arrived from Avignon

to try them on certain accusations of heresy. Colombini and seventy of his followers were present, and the meeting took place at Corneto on June the 4th, 1376.

Several of the "Gesuati" were in practically a dying condition at the time, but by a heroic effort of will they dragged themselves before Urban. (A month later, on July the 31st, Colombini died, and Vincenti on the 15th of the following August.) Both these brave souls had the joy of hearing on the day of the trial that they were acquitted of the charges brought against them, for after a stringent enquiry on the part of the Cardinal of Marseilles, a Dominican, the Pope publicly proclaimed their innocence, permitting them to be re-invested with the white robes of the "Gesuati."

The Papal Court in Viterbo was very splendid, and the "Gesuati" were secretly exulting in their sweet friend Poverty during the time they were there. Vincenti, writing to his friends at Santa Bonda during the illness of Colombini, says: "Just imagine, Madonna and our dear Mother, that in this place is the grandeur and pomp of the world; there are jewels and vestments, and great lords of high rank with all the most beautiful things you can think of. . . . Yet all the same, Poverty has never seemed so precious to us, and has never brought us greater pleasure than it does here. . . ."

These beautiful sentiments are in conformity with another letter sent by Colombini to the sisters of Santa Bonda. . . . "We have the name of being poor, but what a quantity of things you have sent us; it makes us feel quite ashamed."

Unfortunately, the letters which Paola wrote to the "Fratelli Gesuati" are not obtainable, but we can gather from those of Colombini what a strong bond of sympathy existed between them. He says: "With all humility and

goodwill I call you, and desire you for my spiritual Mother, and that you should accept me as your son." A proof of his humility is found in a letter where he says: "I pray for you, Oh dear ones, that you would make special requests for the Holy Church and also for me, a miserable sinner. I feel I have written presumptuously, but I do not write because of any virtue in me, but I fear that in enlightening others I myself may be made blind; however, do pray for me—as I have great need of your prayers."

But Colombini knew in truth how to enlighten and illuminate others; and the accents which we hear vibrating in some of his lovely and sincere letters, could never cloud or blind any noble spirit. In the marvellous lyrical atmosphere of some of these fragments of letters, we seem to breathe the pure and mysterious air of the highest Sienese mysticism, which later on we shall see setting alight the spirit of St. Catherine.

Here is another confession of Colombini: "Most dear friends—how can I express the love and the charity which my heart and soul feel towards you? such love and charity which is alive and burning with the love of the Holy Spirit, transforming everything through the love of Christ. May it enter your souls with penetrating and gentle darts of fire."

And to Madonna Paola. . . . "My spirit is often with thee. Always remember this and keep it in thy mind."

He wished her to be filled with joy, and grieves that "any shadow should ever fall on her heart." "How much your letter pained and distressed me. I cannot tell you how much it grieved me."

In order to console and comfort her, he used to send Barna di Montalcino or Boccia, who were both the

most celebrated singers of his company, to sing praises to her. This loving intimacy existing between Colombini and the sisters of Santa Bonda is the more pleasing, because it was a friendship never spoilt by the hypocritical and unctuous conventionality of stereotyped phrases. The *Epistolario* of Colombini reveals to us even before the *Epistolario* of St. Catherine, how, in the fourteenth century in Siena, a few great souls were able to realise the most perfect ideal of womanly friendship.

In these Sienese mystics religious faith was founded on such firm and generous ground that love never was in danger,—flowering as it did from on high—of being poisoned by even the shadow of a single doubt.

The passion of Christ was a fount of love for those souls, and as in Him they intensely loved the martyr, it can be understood how they had no fear of, but rather a thirst for martyrdom—for in suffering they strengthened and enlarged this divine human feeling, which could smile with supreme satisfacton and pleasure even at death itself.

The first "poverelli" Gesuati knew how to die. One of them, a certain Marco d'Arezzo, felt such a longing for the other world, that being present at the deathbed of a companion he besought him to call him away from earth when he had himself crossed over.

His request was granted, for in a short time Marco fell ill, and was at death's door. On the eve of his departure his companions, seeing him very uneasy, attributed his condition to physical pain, but he said to them: "Oh, you deceive yourselves! There is no doubt but that I suffer physical pain the nearer death approaches; but when a soul has lived entirely with God, Divine mercy inebriates him with such joy on his last day on earth that it conquers every bodily pain. One dies with

joyfulness. That which you thought a sign of suffering was really the thrill which my heart experiences, seeing advancing nearer and nearer its sweet love, its joy, its eternal feast. . . ." The day following he died, with his eyes full of a great light from Heaven.

In a letter directed by Colombini to a man famous in science, a certain Messer Domenico, we find described the kind of passionate love which made the poverello Gesuato forget every earthly sensation. The following passage shows the deep mysticism of these Gesuati ". . . and by means of a passion burning with pure and spotless love to raise the soul high above everything, with no thought of ourselves, nor of God, nor of Christ, nor of life eternal; not speculating in anything either celestial, terrestial, human or divine which the spirit has seen or not seen; without any imagination, but simply the passion of love drawn by the force of the great Love, which unite themselves in one, and become one passion in which is not sought, nor can be sought any one particular thing, but is a note of good in the great Good,—a love in the greatest Love and a flight of love, and when drawn by love neither sees nor hears nor feels anything, but is without measure in its goodness and full of love without end, and according as it is ardently desired it may be given either more or less. Such a passion and love as this enters into the abyss of Love in the Divine depths, Divine are they who enter into this Divine depth, and dark are they who are blind and do not understand and see it, and still darker when they speak of it. This lifting up of the soul would prevent the thinking or considering of any other thing. It is only love that finds Love and the result is joy of joys."

The deep theology which is contained in this letter made a great impression on Domenico, for we see him

replying in these terms: "I understand clearly by your letter that all sciences, natural, ethical, political, metaphysical, economic, liberal, mechanical, as also every sceptical science subject to the intellect, or rather to speculation or sensuality are merely a dark cloud over the soul, as saith the Scripture, *Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas*. I have read all the Old and New Testaments, the *Lives of the Old Fathers*, nearly all the *Works of Deonisio*, the *Compendium of Sacred Theology*, *Deosoebia*, *l'Arilogio della Sapenzia*, *Il Testo della mistica Teologia*, and many other theological books, but never have I had such a light of truth thrown on unitive love as I find in your letter, and I am so greatly disheartened that I appear to myself merely a brute beast, when thinking of my ignorance and poverty of mind."

. . . . . .

Along the remaining arches of the ancient cloister of Santa Bonda, which is now in ruins, there are interlaced two magnificent and perfumed jessamine plants, and in the fragrance which they give to the evening air there seems to be brought to life again the spirit of Paola Foresia and her faithful friend, Giovanni Colombini.

These two friends were not able, much as they wished, to meet for their last farewell, and a pretty legend, now well-nigh forgotten, arose out of this fact.

It is said that Colombini, feeling himself near to Death, having dictated to the notary his last instructions, implored his disciples to carry him to the Monastery of Santa Bonda so that he might breathe his last in the presence of those beloved women.

The band of disciples that accompanied the dying man to fulfil his loving hope had to rest awhile in a desolate spot where the ground was bare and arid. It

was the hour of sunset. The Gesuati, as was their custom, sang joyful hymns of the Eternal Love, and in the solitude the notes of divine joy which arose from those poor wounded hearts produced a miraculous change in the tragically sad country around. Colombini prayed to the Lord God, and behold all at once out of the chalky soil there blossomed forth lovely flowers. Colombini seemed to his companions to be absorbed in a divine ecstasy, his arms uplifted towards Heaven, while he knelt in prayer before the glory of the setting sun. When the last rays had vanished behind the distant mountain, the poverelli Gesuati saw a new miracle. From the face of their dying Master there was reflected over the surrounding flowery oasis all the splendour of the sun which had now disappeared.

Part IV.

CHAPTER I

Catherine Benincasa—Her Political Life

SIENA may well be called the "City of St. Catherine"[1] for every stone seems to have a heart which beats for the maiden who was able to take such a hold of her soul and lift it up to the highest heaven of love. She is the living poetry of the mystical mediæval city. Everything there breathes of her, the legends and tales of the people, the art, the walks, the very sky, all seem fragrant with the memory of the sweet Saint.

The greatest monuments of the city show forth the sovereign qualities of her indomitable spirit, and can be best understood when viewed in the light of an intimate "St. Catherine psychology."

The Duomo, heavy and severe, which awoke in Wagner the sublime mysticism of Parsifal, seems to be covered with the white robe and mantle of the Dominican maid.

The Tower of the Mangia, rising up straight and haughty like a proud sword by the side of the Palazzo Pubblico, seems a living picture of that strong vigilant will which accompanied her democratic aspirations, filling her with those political ideals that made so glorious the Italian Commune of the fourteenth century.

[1] See Illustration.

S. CATHERINE, ANDREA VANNI, 14TH CENTURY.
IN THE CHURCH OF SAN DOMENICO, SIENA.

During the previous century the fathers of the city of Siena had exerted all their powers to form a liberal and civic ideal of life amongst the people, and now, in the fourteenth century, these efforts were seen realised, as if in a miraculous splendour, in the soul of an heroic woman of the people—Catherine Benincasa[1], daughter of Giacomo and Lapa Benincasa, who had twenty-five children, Catherine being one of two delicate twins, born in 1347. The twin sister died in a few days, leaving Catherine to her noble, saintly and active life on behalf of others.

Should we be arriving in Siena from Florence—the rival city—and stop for an instant in front of the Porta Camollia, we see written there a phrase which seems to be in direct contrast to the feelings that the Sienese once entertained for the Florentines, for it reads thus:—

Cor magis tibi Sena pandit.

(Siena opens to thee a heart bigger than this door.)

Such a message of love, such an invitation of peace, seems as if it must have issued from the lips of one who, in the days of wretched party strife, of bitter disputes among the Italian Communes, an ambassadress of the Florentines to the Court of Avignon, even then dreamt of the grandeur of a united Italy—an Italy one and undivided, both in her civil and religious faith.

This phrase, which we might well believe to have been inspired by the Saint when the builder wrote it, makes us understand the beauty of hospitality, which was one of the essential qualities of the "Catherine" spirit, as it is indeed of every great woman's soul.

Every woman has a refined intuition with regard to hospitality and the helping of others, an intuition which might be termed "the eye of the heart," that instinctive

[1] See Illustration.

sense of maternity, of wishing to "mother others"; but this virtue which is so common to all women, and is like a germ of Charity, cannot show itself to perfection if not accompanied by the bright light of intelligence. There are two forms of charity: the material, which consists in helping those whose sufferings can be seen, and the spiritual, which comes to the help of the spirit, the mind, the hidden griefs, the terrible doubts which sometimes develop into the most awful dramas. This, being a silent grief which cannot be seen, must be sought for in the dark, and being unseen neither offends nor troubles us, and to most people is of no consequence or interest.

The task of curing this grief is very difficult. We are spiritually charitable to the extent that we can receive into our heart as guests the griefs, joys, thoughts, hopes, fears and sentiments of our fellow-creatures, to the extent that we are able to overcome their fears, their doubts and misunderstandings with a generous and enlightened judgment, showing them the way by which to direct the mysterious, contrasting, and overflowing forces of the mind into a channel of goodness and peace—that goodness and peace which, owing to dogmatic aphorisms, so many persons have never really understood.

But to possess this divine charity—so different from that which is felt for material distress—the intellect has to be enlightened, and a flame of love must burn in the heart, "a flame which from the heart feeds the intelligence; and an intelligence that calms and makes clear the flame of the heart, so that it shines forth like the flash of a beacon on an impregnable tower, during the nights of storm and tempest."

Catherine of Siena was in truth like a lighthouse of humanity in those dark nights of tempest during the

second half of the fourteenth century, an heroic pilgrim saluting the dawn of day with the sweetest songs of love, attaining to the Vision of God (as did those souls who passed through the naves of the great cathedral poem of Dante), while all the time the Italian lands were being put to fire and sword; the inhabitants engaged in civil wars; the plague massacring in country and in city; the ferocious companies of adventurers from beyond the Alps descending to sack, plunder, and increase the ruin.

At this time the great Mother Rome was hiding in shame because of the cowardice of a fleeing prince; and trying in vain to raise up her head among the ruins of her fallen arches, her broken columns, and her mutilated statues, in a graveyard made alive only by the shades of ancient heroes, and the breeze of glorious memories.

The greatest poem of the fourteenth century was that created by the sentiments and visions of Dante and St. Catherine, the one a Florentine, the other a Sienese: the one a perfect pattern of what a man should be—the other a marvellous type of a lofty Beatrice; the poet of aristocratic lineage—the saint one of the people, and also a leader of men; both magnificent models of a race created for victories.

If we look at their figures in the clear light of the fourteenth century life we see in them splendid specimens of the Tuscan people of that period. We might even say that they were legitimate heirs of all the Roman virtues.

This is not the place to speak of the Roman-like qualities of Dante, but later on we shall see how the thoughts and actions of Catherine constantly focussed their energy on restoring to Rome the dignity and power of the nation, and some of the writers who have under-

stood the political conditions of her day have said that "Catherine, the Virgin of Siena, brought back to God the abandoned Apostolic Chair upon her shoulders."

How a young girl of the people—the daughter of a dyer and fuller—had sufficient force of character and spiritual discipline to carry on her political work, and also lead a life of ecstasy and of philanthropy, seems to us marvellous.

The eyes of her intellect were opened to large and secure visions of the outside world and contemporary realities. She had from early days striven to obtain those powers of freedom necessary to all men and women of action. She was absolutely sovereign of her own passions and will—she despised every softness, and was emancipated from every domestic tie.

Those who know how rigidly the doors of the parental home were closed on girls of good families in the fourteenth century will understand the obstacles Catherine had to overcome before she could open them. There were apparently only two states of life open to her—matrimony or the cloister—and either of them would have meant the sacrificing of the freedom of her actions.

With admirable intuition—a young girl of seventeen—against the wishes of her parents, who desired her to marry, and refusing the advice of the religious men who wished her to become a nun—she chose the Third Order of San Domenico which, while rendering her independent of her family, did not imprison her within the four walls of a convent, nor bind her to the three vows of religion.

The instituting of this "Third Order" of San Francesco and of San Domenico created a republic of persons who wished to lead a religious life though living in the world, free from monastic rules.

THE BIRTH OF S. CATHERINE.

FROM A CODICE OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF PARIS.

CHAPTER II

Catherine Benincasa—Her Cenacolo

THE fourteenth century favoured this revolutionary movement in which the "heretical fraticelli" sects also took part—those "fraticelli" who upheld so boldly the truths of the Gospel of Christ against the Imperialistic and lay policy of the Court of Avignon.

Following the example of her relative, Giovanni Colombini, Catherine's desire was to found a kind of society (cenacolo) where she could mature her ideas of spiritual reconstruction, and so try to gain souls to Christ.

We shall leave on one side the devout little tales which the biographers narrate about her infancy and girlhood, so as to come to the real and true history of the psychological moment when there entered into public life a woman who, in such difficult times, was able to affirm proudly the free rights of the soul.

She wished to have as free and perfect a communion with men as she had with God, without any intermediaries. From the start she had decided to live outside any fixed rule, but to live according to a law—the real inner law—while at the same time remaining respectful to Catholic discipline. She one day wrote to Raimondo da Capua: "Father, thou canst be quite certain that no mortal man has ever taught me any rule of spiritual life, but only my Lord and Master Jesus Christ, Who either through some secret impulse sent by Him, or through His speaking to me, or appearing to me, has always taught me what I ought to do." These words define at

once the profound and personal character of her mysticism. There is one episode which shows us better than anything the depth of her charitable soul and the independence of her mind in face of the judgment and external conventions of the world. We quote from a letter that her friend and secretary, Stefano Maconi, wrote to Caffarini, the author of the *Supplemento alla Leggenda di Santa Caterina* (a genuine document of great value, showing an intimate knowledge of the mind of the Saint).

"One day," wrote Maconi, "while she was sitting in the open air with her companions, a poor man came to them asking for alms." "Dear brother," said Catherine, "I assure thee that I have no money to give thee." "But," he remarked, "thou could'st give me thy cloak." "True," said Catherine, and taking off her cloak she gave it to him at once..

Those who were with her redeemed it, but not without difficulty, for the man would not give it up except at a high price. Being asked later how she could ever have thought of showing herself in the streets without a cloak, she replied in these noble words: "I prefer to be without a cloak rather than without charity."

To understand fully the value of this act of hers and also the meaning of this reply, which the biographers of St. Catherine have always quoted without explanations, we must remember that, in Siena, a woman who walked along the streets without a cloak was recognised as a public courtesan, the Statutes declaring that no "honest" woman must be seen in the streets without her mantle, which women of loose life did not wear, and "this was a sign of their calling." One may be ashamed of a thing without fear, but fear always follows a feeling of shame, and in the case of Catherine, when she faced and con-

quered shame, it showed that she was possessed of an innocence which is the purity of courage. Never did she shrink because of the fear of human respect, that is—of servile fear. Every act of hers, every word, was an affirmation of liberty. With this feeling she succeeded rapidly in creating within herself that atmosphere of spiritual sympathy which attracted to her the most generous and sincere of those of her fellow-citizens who constituted her famous "cenacolo."

She gathered together poets, artists, politicians, men of law and men of religion, all of whom deepened her culture and at the same time enlarged her field of action. She collected information from all her friends, information which she utilised in her public life. One of these friends, the artist Andrea Vanni, who has left to us, in the Church of San Domenico in Siena, the oldest picture of the Saint, was in 1368 one of the chiefs of the popular party, and took an active part in the revolution which led to the fall of the "Governo dei Dodici" (Government of the Twelve.) He and Bartolo the brother of Catherine were nominated "Difensore della Repubblica," and in 1373 Vanni went to Avignon as ambassador of the Sienese to beg the Pope, Gregory XI, to return to Rome. There is no doubt but that Catherine obtained from him a great deal of valuable information regarding those who formed the Avignon "Curia," the character of the Pope, and the real state of the politics of the time. From the English hermit, William Flete, a man of great political and religious power (who later, together with St. Catherine, must have inspired the government of Richard II in the famous *Rationes Anglicorum* in favour of Urban VI), Catherine received her information regarding the political condition of England. From her friends Salimbeni, Saracini, Tolomei, Piccolomini, Malavolti,

she learnt all about the Guelph and Ghibelline strifes among the Italian aristocracy. She discussed questions of art and poetry with Anastagio di Monte Altino and Giacomo del Pecora, who wrote poems in her honour; and with Raimondi da Capua and Tommaso della Fonte she discoursed of things Divine. Amongst these groups the one to whom she was most attached was the young poet, Neri di Landoccio dei Pagliaresi, who was also her first secretary. She knew him first in 1370, and he accompanied her in her travels, remaining with her until her death. He was a young man belonging to a noble Sienese family, of rather a melancholy poetic temperament, and extraordinarily sensitive. Some beautiful verses which he wrote gained great fame in Siena and captivated the sympathy of the Saint.

Catherine loved all things beautiful. She had a passion for music, poetry and nature, and is said to have herself written poems. We know that in her "cenacolo" the works of Dante were read, for Giunta di Grazia alludes to this in a letter to Pagliaresi.

In her little garden at the side of the house she delighted to cultivate her flowers, the roses, lilies, and violets which she sometimes wove into garlands, and Caffarini says that when amongst her flowers she would be so overwhelmed with the immensity of Divine Love, that she would burst forth into songs of praise to her Lord.

The sweet tones of her voice imparted a spring-like freshness to her songs of praise, and the flower of her sweet and gentle thoughts perfumed them. Looking at a rose tree surrounded by thorns she afterwards puts her thoughts into words. "We must try to find in the midst of the thorns the perfume of the rose which is just about to open."

She loved hearing the organ and the sound of the evening bells, and in the twilight would sit and lose herself in the contemplation of the firmament above. She writes in the *Dialogo:* "All the passions and powers of a soul regulated by perfection give out a harmonious sound like that of the chords of a musical instrument. The powers of the soul are the major chords, the thoughts and feelings of the body the minor chords, and when all are dedicated to the praise of God and to serving our neighbour, then they give forth such a chord as one hears from a grand harmonious organ."

This musical conception of life, together with her courageous will, her youth triumphant in love, and her splendid intelligence, gave forth an irresistible charm—dominating all those with whom she came into contact, rich or poor, clever or simple.

That she knew herself to be possessed of this secret power of conquering others we have proofs in the imperious letters she wrote, wherein in the midst of the sweetness and of the severity of her persuasive arguments she showed a spirit which she knew could not be disobeyed, because she felt the force of the Divine in the sentiments which she had expressed.

No pride or vanity cast a shadow over her victories, neither was there any foolish modesty. She spoke, wrote, and acted naturally, just as her womanly heart dictated. Francesco Malavolti, a young man of the world, impatient of any attempts to curb him in his gay life, but a great admirer of the Saint, relates a fact which gives us a very intimate idea of her sympathy and her true womanly nature:—

"After the return from Avignon I had gone back to some of my old habits of life. Notwithstanding this, whenever I went to visit her she always received me with

such brightness and joy that my mind was greatly relieved. One of her companions, however, began to complain about me, and reprove me for my instability, but Catherine only smiled and said, 'Do not fret, sister, for whichever road he may take he will never be able to escape me. When he believes me far away, I shall place around his neck such a yoke that he will never be able to free himself from it.' "

In these words, and in a phrase from her very own lips showing the quality of her feeling, we get an insight into her mind. She loved those whose minds were free from even the shadow of egotism, so that she might instil into them sound ideals.

The spirituality of the love which possessed her is made clear to us moderns in the mystic enquiry of Emerson, that deep searcher into the fundamental truth of the human spirit, when he discovered the inner meaning of the question: "If I love you what is that to you? We say so because we feel that what we love is not in your will but above it. It is the radiance of you and not you. It is that which you know not in yourself and never can know."

It was the discovery of the Divine Love that made Catherine Benincasa great. Gradually, as she rose to the conquest of the truth, she accustomed herself more and more to love the inner beauty of the mind rather than persons and things. She, like Dante, climbed to such heights that she could dominate the storms of religious and political passions; "could preach to angry mobs, could help the dying, could act in delicate diplomatic negotiations, converse with the great ones of the earth, mediate between Pope and King, see visions and dream dreams."

CHAPTER III

Catherine Benincasa—The Roman Question

WHEN Catherine was twenty-one years old, that is in 1368, she saw the German power humbled in Siena in the person of Charles IV. It was this same Emperor who had in 1355 favoured the rising of the nobles when the glorious "Governo dei Nove" had been defeated, that "Governo" composed of the popular middle classes to which the families of Catherine and her relative Giovanni Colombini had belonged, and which had created the greatness of the Republic.

Charles was again with subtle intrigue trying to make himself master of the city by taking advantage of the civil disorders which now reigned. He had succeeded in obtaining for his natural brother the "Patriarca" d'Aquileia the post of "Capo Onorario della Repubblica" (Honorary Chief of the Republic), but this only lasted for a few weeks, for the Sienese, becoming aware of the secret designs of the Emperor, compelled the Patriarca to resign, and the popular government was re-established.

But in 1368 the nobles, eager to re-assume power, again renewed their revolutionary attempts, and once more (as he had done thirteen years previously) Charles, under the guise of friendship, entered Siena, this time as a guest of the powerful family of the Salimbeni. He was accompanied by the Empress and a retinue of 1200 cavaliers. Being in want of money he had pawned with certain bankers in Florence his Imperial Crown, and the Sienese authorities had to redeem it for him. But he was not even grateful to them—on the contrary—he

haughtily demanded that there should be ceded to him four important fortresses, and also the Port of Talamone, which was the maritime key of the Republic.

This demand was disdainfully refused, so then he tried by a trick (aided by the nobles), to get possession of the city—and dismissed the "Dodici" from the Palazzo Pubblico.

Once more the Sienese, in order to protect their liberty, rose up as one man in a marvellous burst of patriotism, and put to flight the Imperial troops.

The chronicler Neri di Donati says: "The Emperor, all alone in the Salimbeni Palace, was a prey to the most abject fear. He wept, he prayed, he embraced everybody, and begged forgiveness for the mistake he had made."

Siena could afford to be generous and forgave him, but only on condition that he left the city immediately.

In this way the Government was strengthened anew, and the popular spirit of the ancient middle class ruled once more.

This episode contributed to the formation of the political views of Catherine, who, like all the Sienese mystics, joined to her religious work a strong love of country, and this is why she could not, in a Ghibelline city, nourish the Imperialist dream of Dante.

Before her eyes—the eyes of a maiden who was prepared to act as the mediator of God in the midst of human strife—she saw an Italy torn with anarchy, a Pontificate now become foreign and dragged into the orbit of the French power (after the blow of Anagni), an Empire alien to every Roman feeling, which competed with the Companies of adventurers and with the French Cardinals,—who were the legates of the Popes—to ravish and pillage in the garden of Europe.

Catherine was Sienese—but she was above all Italian, and used to speak of her co-citizens as "these our Italians of Siena."

She first of all occupied herself in trying to pacify her own fellow-citizens, but before long found that she could not form a national policy in the highest and truest sense of the word within the four walls of her native city, but would be obliged to extend it to the whole of Italy, and not only to Italy but also to Europe. She sought to give to Italy a feeling of united civil consciousness which would free her from the foreigner, and also to re-awaken in all the Catholic nations a religious feeling of unity—a grand fraternity in Christ, which would give to the people strength; such a strength that would rid the Holy Land of all unbelievers, and prepare at the same time to put up such barriers that would prevent any future invasion of them into Europe.

Such were the principal lines of the political policy which she had in view. The integral part of her religious programme—reform inside the Church, was contained in this her political programme, for it aimed at two high ends, which were: first of all the return of the Pope to Rome, and then the formation of a Crusade against the Turks by all Christian peoples. To both aims there were opposed different obstacles.

Philip the Fair had desired, and to a certain extent, imposed on the Pope, Clement V, the transferring to Avignon of the Pontifical See, for the French king gauged well the value of the moral, financial and political power of the Papacy. He had well understood that the placing of this power at the service of France would prove of the greatest value and utility to his realm in many ways, and especially in his disputes with England. Also by sending French Cardinals to represent the Pope as Legates, he

would have a distinct and real domination over the States of Italy.

The political insight of the French monarchy that conquered the Roman Papacy in the fourteenth century was verily marvellous, for it succeeded in transforming it into a lay body, incorporating into it all that authority and power which would prove of advantage to France.

Few realise that it is to the Papal powers of Clement V and John XXII that France owes its colonial prestige, a prestige which gives to it, far more than did the Crusade of St. Louis, the right of a Protectorate over the Catholic missions, missions which were energetically carried out in India, China, Egypt, Nubia, Abyssinia, Tripoli, and Morocco. This is proved by the registers of the Avignon Popes, which were published not many years ago by the French Government.

The money that these pontiffs extorted from their Christian flocks went largely to enrich the national Public Treasury.

The expenses of the war against England which the French had to bear were fully shared by Clement VI and his brother Guglielmo Roger. In fact, between the years 1345 and 1350, Philip of France received 592,000 gold florins and 5000 scudi, and John the enormous sum of 3,513,000 gold florins.

We can therefore easily see that the ideals of Catherine to bring back the Papal See to Italy were against the most vital interests of the French monarchy.

A crusade by the Christian nations against the unbelieving Turks also presented many difficulties. The bitter enmity between France and England; the discords between the Republic of Genoa and that of Venice; and the league of Italian cities headed by Florence against the Pope of Avignon were some of the obstacles.

The Avignon "Curia," like France, was not against the idea of the crusade; on the contrary, such an undertaking favoured the expansion of the French missions in the East, and would certainly have strengthened the Imperial policy of the King of France, had it been accomplished. In fact, no sooner had Pietro Roger de Beaufort-Turenne ascended the Pontifical Throne as Gregory XI, than he immediately wrote in 1371 to the King of England, the Count of Flanders, and the Doge of Venice to try and induce them to take up arms against the Turks, and at the same time—with subtle shrewdness—he presented to Raimondo Berenger, Grand Master of the Cavalieri di Rodi, the rich principality of Smyrna, where there could be established the first base of operations in the East—on *French* ground.

The war between Genoa and Venice caused the undertaking to collapse.

Meanwhile the enthusiasm which the maiden of Siena and Pope Gregory XI both had for the crusade was effective in drawing closer their own bond of union. But there was one point where their ideas differed—that is—the Roman question, the return of the Pope to Rome. Gregory's predecessor Urban V had so miserably failed in re-conducting to Rome the Papal Government, that it gave no encouragement to Gregory, while to Catherine it stood at the height of all her desires.

The opposition of the French cardinals to this project was naturally unyielding.

Gregory, a man of short stature, pale and delicate, revealed in his personal appearance that which he lacked in his spirit—that is—courage and force of purpose.

It was the maid Catherine who succeeded in instilling into the mind of this weak and hesitating man the qualities of a leader. She alone succeeded in making

him a *Roman*. The marvellous letters written by her are irrefutable proofs of this.

Siatemi uomo virile e non timoroso, she cried to him. (Be a man, be virile and not timid.)

When the French counsellors came to Gregory they tried their best to persuade him not to go to Rome, insinuating that he would perhaps be killed, and instilling into his mind the suspicion that his predecessor, Urban V, had been poisoned. They also got Beato Pietro d'Aragona to write him a letter begging him not to go to Rome, where "he would be assassinated at once."

Catherine when she heard of this letter, wrote to the Pope an admirable refutation of what Beato Pietro had written. These are some of her remarks: "It seems to me that they are already trying to dissuade you with their writings, and besides the writings they announce that this servant of God is coming to see you and will arrive at your door when you are not expecting him. Of course, it sounds humble when he says: 'If it will be opened to me I shall enter, and we can discuss and reason matters together.' But he only wears the garb of humility in order to gain favour with you. How glorious then is this virtue with which pride cloaks itself. . . . I do not believe that he has said all that they declare; from all that I can see or understand of it, and to me they do not appear like his own words—the words of a servant of God. It does not seem to me that he who composed all this knew the art well. He ought to go to school to learn, for I think he knows less than a child. See then, Holy Father, that he has placed before you that which he knows to be the weakest feelings of men, especially of men who are very tender and compassionate towards their own carnal affections and their own bodies, for these are they who hold their bodies dearer than all

others. And, as you see, he has placed that as his first argument." It was in such frank words as these that the Saint wrote to the Pontiff. And it was in this way that she showed to the weak faint-hearted man that the beauty of the path to be trodden is in proportion to the danger to be encountered. Catherine spoke and acted like a soldier. She says: "Virtue is in the heart like a captain in a fort—enemies enter within and live at first in the suburbs of the city of the soul, but sometimes they seize the whole city with the fortress of the will."

She represented to herself the work of redemption as "a tourney of death with life," adding: "We are bought not with gold and sweetness of love only, but with blood . . . ." "He who has no battle has no victory, and he who has no victory is filled with confusion. In time of war we give life for life, blood for blood."

CHAPTER IV

The Death of St. Catherine

CATHERINE hated all mediocre things, words of double-meaning and dark counsels, and she scorned human prudence. When reading her *Epistolario*, the violence of her courage passes through it like an irresistible wave, and we see how clever she was in reading men's characters, the quickness and soundness of her judgment, and at the same time the charm of her incisive illuminating phrases, which Vico describes to us as "being full of passion, capable of prolonging the exercise of her will beyond the momentary exaltation of enthusiasm."

It is there that she shows the force of that inner discipline which consisted in a power of self-inhibition, enabling her to keep her thoughts fixed on an object until they reached the point of setting it aflame.

One of the greatest attributes to be admired in this extraordinary woman was her power of keeping her line of action fixed; it was never arrested, never deviated, but ran securely and quickly towards the final end, even under the threat of years, adverse fortune, and the weakness of a frail body. She felt that Death urged her on irrevocably, and this presentiment of her coming end made her feel the necessity of hastening, acting, multiplying her activities and energies, showing to all the value of time. To the Pope she wrote: "It is no longer time to sleep, because Time never sleeps, but passes like the wind. . . ."

We feel the woman of action when she says: "Do that which is necessary with cheerfulness and a good

heart." And to a friend she writes: "If thou could'st not go straight thou should'st have gone on all fours; if not as a "frate" then as a pilgrim; if thou hadst no money thou should'st have asked alms." Christ said: "He who has ears let him hear," and Catherine said: "He who has feet let him walk."

We remain stupefied at such a vast conflagration of the spirit that she was enabled to set alight in the short space of her youth, for we must remember that she was only thirty-three when she died, and only when we measure the extent of her political and spiritual activity by the measure of the time that she lived, can we form any adequate idea of her extraordinary energy.

From 1372, which we may term her first year of political life, when she started her negotiations with Cardinal d'Estaing, the new Papal Legate in Italy, so as to induce him to come to a peace—until 1380 when she died, her life was full of activity. During these years we see passing through her hands all the wires of the principal political questions of the day, from the quarrels of the Visconti with the Pope to the internal affairs of the Tuscan cities, Siena, Pisa and Lucca. The City of Florence sent her in 1376 as ambassadress to the Court of Avignon to beg that the interdict might be raised. While in Avignon, besides treating of the Florentine cause she occupied herself actively in the internal reform of the Church, using most scathing words when speaking to those who formed the "Curia Avignonese," and expressing her opinions to the Pope himself. ". . . In order to reconstruct the whole it is necessary to destroy the old, right down to the foundations." Tearing down the nets of the Court intrigues and wrapping round him the flame of her own courage she induced Gregory XI to return to Rome. Meanwhile she had not given up her

idea of the Crusade, which she thought was the only hope for a pacification of Europe. It seems a miracle that she was able to win to her side the Duke of Anjou, brother of Charles V of France, who had gone to Avignon for the express purpose of paralysing her influence with the Pope, but instead of conquering he was conquered. Catherine, accepting his invitation, went for three days as guest to the Duke's Castle at Villeneuve, during which time the Duke and the "popolana" of Siena discussed the gravest international problems. He tried to induce her to go to Paris, so that she might initiate negotiations of peace between France and England, but this she refused to do, for the affairs of Italy were too near her heart, and she saw clearly, as time also showed—that French and Italian politics were too much in conflict.

The Pope, Gregory XI, according to Raimondi di Capua, a witness worthy of being believed, gave to Catherine plenary powers to make peace with the Florentines: "So as to show to thee that I do really wish for peace I confide to thee the arrangements—*Only save the honour of the Church.*"

Catherine succeeded in her work of reconciliation, although she had many obstacles to surmount, and was even in danger of losing her life through the uprising of some of the lowest classes of Florence. She then retired for a while into solitude in order to dictate the *Dialogo* to her secretaries, Neri Pagliaresi, Stefano Maconi, and Barduccio Canigiani. Caffarini tells us that she finished this work on the 13th of October, 1378. The *Dialogo* is a book of high inspiration, in which the soul is absorbed in the God of truth and love; it is the expression of her meditative life, as the *Epistolario* is of her fighting life.

In the *Dialogo* she tasted the joy of meditation, as she confesses in a letter written to Fra Raimondo a short

time before dying. "Also I beg that the Book and writings that you find of mine, you and Frate Bartolomeo and Frate Tommaso and il Maestro, that you will pass them through your hands and do with them as seems best to you, so that it may bring more honour to God, in which writings I have found some recreation."

After the quiet work of the summer and autumn of 1378 she returned with renewed passion to her active life, and in order to hasten her dream of a united Italy got into touch with the captains of the bands of adventurers; winning over to her side, in the matter of the Crusade, Giovanni Aguto, the terrible chief of the English band. She was on terms of great friendship with Alberigo da Barbiano, and perhaps it is owing to her that the organiser of the first Italian national army drove out the barbarians from Italy, embracing resolutely the cause of Urban VI against the French anti-pope, Clement VII, who had ordered—as Cardinal Legate—that all the Italians in the Romagna should be massacred.

Having re-conducted to Rome the Pope, Gregory XI, and later hailed with joy the return to the See of Peter of an Italian Pope in the person of Bartolomeo Prignano, who assumed the name of Urban XI, Catherine during the last two years of her life had the grief of seeing the Church unexpectedly torn by schism.

France prepared herself—as against the Italian victories of the Sienese maiden—to vindicate the Pontifical authority in the person of the anti-pope, Clement VII. Catherine then increased the energies of her exhausted frame so as to gather together the European nations and the Italian States in defence of the Italian Pope, and marvellous was this her last great battle fought *from* Rome *for* Rome.

From the Eternal City, where she encouraged and harangued in the Consistory the Italian Cardinals, she wrote these memorable words to her friends: "I walk in the blood of the martyrs, the blood of the martyrs boils and invites the living to be strong." With scorching phrases she marked with a brand of infamy the three Italian Cardinals who in the Conclave of Fondi had remained neutral, not daring to oppose themselves to the election of a French Pope.

She gained to the cause of Urban all Italy with the exception of Giovanna di Napoli, and to her, foretelling in a letter the rebellion of the Barons and of the people, she wrote: "Alas! one can weep over thee as over one who is dead."

Proud in her menaces and in courage, Catherine of Siena blazed forth in indignation, but anger never blinded her good sense and she was always guided by charity. When Alberigo da Barbiano defeated the Gascoigne soldiery of the anti-pope with his Company of St. George, Catherine wrote to him: "Take great care of the wounded." To Urban VI, the victor, she wrote begging him to mitigate his wrath against the rebels, saying: "We do not expect to be humiliated." To the King of France she sent this imperative message: "Fulfil the Will of God and mine."

Meanwhile in Rome there were creeping in anarchical ideas, which the emissaries of the anti-pope fomented out of hatred to Urban VI. Catherine foresaw the dangers threatening to fall on the Church and on Italy, but her strength was feeble. She felt she was dying. Two months before her death she wrote to Urban VI that admirable letter where she recommends him to deal with his subjects with a "firmness founded on truth." She begged him to promise only that which he could be

sure of performing, and to respect the will of the people. "Be always virile, always a model in words, manners and in all thy operations. Let everything be clear in the sight of God and of men." She reminded him that the ruin of Italy came about through the faults of bad ecclesiastical rulers. These were her last exhortations of a public character to the Pontiff.

From the testimony of her friend, Barduccio Canigiani, we extract this account of her death, which took place in Rome.

"From the first days of the year 1380, she had been unable to eat much, and latterly even unable to drink water, so that she suffered from thirst. On the Sunday before Ascension Day her body was only a skeleton, and from her waist down had no feeling, but in her face life was still radiant.

"Before dying she said to her disciples: 'I shall pray to the Eternal Truth that all the fullness of grace and gifts that He would have given to my soul may flow abundantly into the souls of all my disciples.' Then followed other deep spiritual words, but owing to the weakness of her voice and the grief of those present, many were unable to hear her, and they placed their ears near to her lips, each one gathering alternately a few words to put together later on and make of them a treasure. She asked for her mother's blessing. She prayed to the Lord for His mercy in virtue of His Precious Blood, and feeling that she was going to Him she repeated several times, while gasping for breath, 'Blood, Blood.' Then bowing her head with a gentle movement she gave up her soul to God."

It was a Sunday—6 o'clock—when there passed from this world Catherine of Siena, she who had always desired to be a "lover and announcer of the truth," of

that truth which according to her words is "the riches of life"; that is "silent when it is time to be silent, and being silent cries out with the cry of patience."

. . . . . .

Translator's note.—The Republic of Siena sent a deputation to the Pope to express a desire that the body of Catherine should be brought to her native city, so he ordained a "pious mutilation" and the head of the Saint was severed from the body and being placed in a reliquary was conveyed to Siena. A procession was formed which went forward along the road for a mile to meet those who bore the reliquary, and the whole city in festive attire awaited its arrival.

The brothers and sisters of San Domenico who were waiting at the church received the precious relic, which was placed over one of the altars, where it still remains.

CHAPTER V

St. Catherine's Mystic Life

THE virgin Catherine when quite young saw in a vision, "a certain place outside this world in which there was a great multitude of people engaged in different operations and busy with various kinds of work. Not understanding the reason of all this, she dared not pass through such a crowd, and, as she stood fearing and trembling, she heard a voice saying to her: 'If thou wouldest pass through this people it were better for thee to hide thyself under a white robe.' Raising her eyes she saw San Domenico, whose portrait she had often seen in the church. He continued, 'Come and receive my habit.' She started to follow him, when there came after her two wicked women, gorgeously attired, who seized her dress to draw her into their power. She turned on them, striking out, and forcing them to let her go, and then she followed San Domenico."

When a child, Catherine spent much time in a little farm belonging to the Benincasa family, which was near San Rocco a Pilli, and here among the vine and olive trees she enjoyed the sweetness of spring time, and the poetic melancholy of autumn.

She saw the peaceful changes in the labour of the peasants; she felt the poetry of Mother Earth, the beauty of the trees and flowers, of the herbs and of all the minute creations of the great God. She had a passion for flowers, and, rambling through the garden, would gather tiny buds and weave them into little crosses, which she gave to her confessor, Padre Tommaso, as

gifts for his friends. She often dreamed that angels descended from Heaven and crowned her with white lilies. These dreams, together with her poetic contemplation of the beauty of Nature, became to her visions. Many of her words in the *Epistolario* and in the *Dialogo* were suggested by what she saw and felt in this little farm. On the wall surrounding the house which has since been built on the site of the Benincasa farm, there can be seen a bust of the Saint, and also this verse:—

Santa Caterina da Siena Vergine
Tu che questo suolo un giorno
Possedendo calcasti, ora dal cielo
Rendilo pur d'ogni dovizia adorno.

(Sweet St. Catherine, Holy Virgin.
Who once didst tread this very ground,
Look down from Heaven with favour on it,
With richest gifts let it be crowned.)

The virgin Catherine for several years never left her cell except to go to Church, and she is said to have remained for the greater part of her brief life in a "cell of self-knowledge so as to know God better." She loved others so as to clothe herself and them in a robe of love and charity, for she listened more attentively to the voice of Love than to the voice of Theology, her faith being that "the soul should live in God, and God in the soul."[1]

Catherine had perhaps in a higher degree than any other religious woman an intense anxiety and desire for the salvation of souls. This is seen throughout all her teachings; while her ecstasies, her inward conflicts, her visions contributed to reveal her deep mysticism. She

[1] This corresponds to the Pauline Theology in Colossians iii. 4, Philippians i. 21 and Galatians ii. 20.

dictated to three of her disciples in 1378 those wonderful and sublime words which we find in *Il Dialogo*. Reading them we see a life so different from that of her political activity, that it makes us wonder all the more how this remarkable young girl could ever have crowded so many different experiences into the short span of her thirty-three years of life.

Christ had not in vain said to her: "Thou knowest Me in thee, and from this knowledge thou wilt draw what is needed for thee."

"In the knowledge of Myself thou wilt humble thyself, seeing that thou thyself dost not exist, and thy very being as thou shalt know is from Me, for I have loved thee and others, before thou wast, and that with a Love Ineffable."

In her writings we often find the expression "crimson gift," and she always speaks of the blood shed by Our Lord with the passionate love of a martyr.

"The Blood of Christ is the price of spiritual regeneration—the price of Love; and ingratitude is, therefore, the greatest of sins, the despising of the Blood of Christ."

In her *Dialogo*[1] she has left to us these sublime thoughts:—

"Thou demandest me to sustain thee, and to punish the faults of others in thee, and thou dost not perceive that thou wert asking for love, light, and knowledge of truth, because already I have told thee that the bigger the love the greater is the grief and pain, so that in whom grows the love, grows the grief."

This is the fate of true love—to remain as the maiden says, "in continual pain," for where love grows, grows

[1] *Dialogo* published by Gigli. Il Guidini in his *Ricordi* appearing in *l'Archivio storico*, tom. 4, treats of the *Dialogo* at length, and speaks of having translated it into Latin about 1386. A specimen of this translation is to be found in the Bibliotheca di Siena, Cod.T.2.4.

grief, as grows also knowledge. The souls richest in depth of feeling are those who are most exposed to the heavy blows of grief, but, like the Sienese Saint, they are those who also know best how to win hearts. From grief then is born a consolation which is "a fount of water springing into eternal life."

The following reflections of St. Catherine unveil to us the secret of her conquests:—

"The intellect feeds the affections. . . .

"He who knows most loves most, and the more he loves the more he tastes of love. . . .

"A person is of use to another creature to the extent that he loves him and no more, and he is wanting in service to the extent that he is wanting in love. From seeing himself loved he comes to love still more profoundly.

"Love begets love and love makes thee persevere. . ."

The life of every great soul is a flame of passionate feeling that conquers his being, and for the mystics this feeling was decidedly a tremendous love of God—that is—a religious faith which theologians would call a miraculous gift of Grace, while physiologists would term it a physical gift, but it is always something that attaches itself in an absolute manner to the living consciousness of man; a Force, which when everything is lost, when health goes, friends and wealth disappear, when he sees his own feelings humiliated and all that is dear to him either in persons or things brought low, still survives intact, blossoming in the desert of sadness, filling with joy all his innermost world.

The loves of men have but a fleeting joy, for they only rest on momentary illusions which are suddenly destroyed; but Divine Love means eternal happiness, for it finds its

peace in the Absolute, and in every mystic soul there is latent the belief that his real self belongs to the other world. If we adopt Schopenhauer's simile we might say that as two lovers desire that they may live again in the child who is born to them, so in the union of a soul with God there arises mysteriously the desire to give birth to a new creature, shorn of all earthly weight of sin; free from every yoke—pure and happy. When we hear of saints like Colombini and Catherine speaking of the different steps by which the soul passes from earthly love to that of invisible beauty, when they seek to discover the analogies of this process with other movements of the human mind, we feel that there is in their words a hidden force, the flame of which consumes their mortal bodies, thus giving birth to the eternal life of the soul.

Divine Love is the only passion that is able to absorb the whole life of a person, for death does not put an end to it, but only converts it into possession. This differs from all those loves which are the result of physical desire—the vainest of things, the most precarious illusion,—for, once satiated, the desire fades away.

Divine Love is an eternal betrothal of the soul with the object of its passion, an object which, being invisible, all the more deeply moves the soul with a yearning which is the beginning of the soul's union with God. For this reason all high, heroic, infinite aspirations only increase more deeply in lovers of God that longing for death which will bring them nearer to the Supreme Love—for death puts an end to their earthly life and brings them near to the fulfilment of their happiness. They are indifferent to sacrifice, indifferent to grief, as if they were, in fact, denying even the wish to continue in this present life. Those daily cares, that preoccupation which men feel about their daily wants, never in the slightest degree

trouble the mystic saint, who resembles the flowers of the field and the birds of the air, rather than the busy little ant who lays up its store with such selfish care.

The saint is also in some ways selfish, for all mankind is selfish, but the egotism of the mystic is purified by the fact that his treasures of love are used as treasures of charity, real charity towards those who suffer in silence and oblivion. The selfishness of the saint, far from impoverishing human life, enriches it. Those rare souls who, in all ages, after long and oft-times hard experiences succeeded in entering into the real religious life have done so by renouncing all vain outward habits, the garish colour of which allures the greater part of mankind. They have put on a robe which is heavy with sacrifice and heroic faith. In spite of apparent contradictions they see that all is not vanity in the universe although many philosophers find this difficult to believe. But the really religious soul finds that griefs are after all only means of purification, and of an uplifting of the spirit. Properly used they become, with the help of Divine Love, an arm of conquest and a joy which finds its greatest and highest pleasure in a life of religious activity.

CHAPTER VI

The Doctrine of St. Catherine

IF we wish to consider with fair and just comparison the lives of the different saints, we shall find that it is not their history, nor particular forms of devotion, nor their miraculous powers, nor particular forms of penitence, that prove, and in a certain way seal them with the value of sanctity. The saints differed from one another as do other men, but they all had something in common in their zeal for the glory of God, in their impressive and exceptional susceptibility towards all that had to do with Christ, and in their anxiety for the salvation of the souls of men.

St. Catherine identified spiritual salvation with the possession of Truth as reflected in God. She says that it is needful for the soul to "dwell in the mental cell," in order to know and love the "riches of the light" and to dissipate the "poverty of the darkness." This most modern woman speaks to us of the "odore" of truth, and teaches us how we must knock at its door. She had a horror of ignorance: "Whoever lives in the darkness of ignorance finds himself in a state of barbarism." Those persons who are "Inselvatiche" (like undomesticated animals), against the truth seemed to her unutterably miserable. "Do not go for many counsels," said St. Catherine; "Nevertheless, do not despise the knowledge of any person."

In this way she maintained contact with external forces, opening the windows of her intelligence. Her doctrine is of just tolerance. "Those who are in error must not

be looked upon as enemies, but as infirm." And she adds: "Receive from the infirm that which he is able to give thee." But the master—that is—the creator of his own perfection is "he who labours with the truth that he has within himself."

Such is the artist, the scientist; such are the great apostles, and the greatness of each one is measured by the intensity of this secret labour with the truth that he has within himself. In this way Catherine shows to us clearly the origin and genesis of every human perfection. "The highest virtue is born from the deepest communion with truth, from knowing how to make it live sincerely, and express itself with power. The perfect expression of the real truth should be simple and humble, there should be no mixing of self-love with it, no tenderness for ourselves, since those who are filled with a love sensitive and particular to themselves, are not able to fill the heart and the affection with love of the Truth, and so they find themselves in lies, and lies weaken both soul and body."

We see how Catherine insisted on the idea that a moral defect hurts not only the soul but also the body. She well understood the mysterious power of mind over body, the truth of which is at the present time being disclosed to us by the psychologists, and she knew the joys of the highest blessing. This is how she describes ecstasy: "Very often the body is lifted up from the earth through the perfect union that the soul has with itself and God. And being still mortal it can yet taste the good of the immortals. The strength of the spirit united with God raises from the earth the weight of the body, leaving it as if immovable, and torn by the affection of the soul. The memory is never satisfied except in God; the intellect, being uplifted, gazes on the object of

His truth; the affection which follows the intellect loves and unites itself with that which the eye of the intellect sees. Gathered together and united, these powers being immersed and inflamed in God, the body loses its feeling, so that the seeing eye sees not, the hearing ear hears not, the tongue speaks not, the hand toucheth not, the feet walk not. All the members are occupied with the sentiment of love. For these members are employed to do things so contrary to their nature, that they all as with one voice cry to God that they want to be separated from the soul, and the soul from the body. And they cry to God with the Glorious Paul: 'Oh wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' "

CHAPTER VII

The "Epistolario" of St. Catherine

CATHERINE of Siena was not a little weak flame which could be extinguished if it encountered obstacles, but such a flame that, enveloping all obstacles, so transformed them that they were carried up in another and more splendid form into the heavens. She possessed the secret of genuine heroism; her mysticism was constructive, not like that of the German mystics, who wasted their own spiritual forces in the abyss of the Indefinite.

Catholic mysticism is classic, and the visions which arose through it and reached to the height of ecstatic raptures were always described with great precision, and with that clearness which is a distinguishing quality of the Latin and Catholic mind.

Catherine required order in love. In fact she wrote: "The soul that loves in a disorderly way becomes insupportable to itself. Disorderly love is self-love."

There is no salvation outside of order. Catherine felt this so strongly that all the practical forces of her religious, political, and social actions were directed to bring back order into the Church which was torn with avarice and heresies; to minds separated into factions; and to herself, living both the tumultuous life of practical deeds and also that of contemplation.

The conflicts between "Realisti," "Nationalisti," the various "fraticelli" sects; the upholders of the spirit of liberty against that of authority,—all of which provoked heresies and schisms—had occupied the minds of saints

and philosophers who had vainly sought to settle them, and now a solution of them was found in this Sienese woman, who let herself be guided by the most illumined Love,—by the safest womanly intuition.

That is why it is so pleasing for us to see in Catherine of Siena the moral beauty of a consoler of souls. She was one among the few women who was endowed with the supreme gift of creating a cult of friendship, and it is under this form that we are enabled to see the truest and deepest aspect of her unusual character when we read the *Epistolario*.

We love in Catherine the woman who "from the abundance of the heart spoke that which she felt," as is the testimony of one of her most intimate friends, to whom she said: "To those who wish to receive the love contained in the words of Jesus Christ there is no better way than to clothe themselves in the love contained in the words He has spoken to them."

We gain an insight into the psychology of Catherine when we examine the cordial relations of friendship that existed between her and her spiritual friends: Pagliaresi, Maconi, Caffarini, Barduccio Canigiani, Giovanni dalle Celle, Nigi di Docci, and others whose names are registered in the *Ricordi* del Guidini. They were all in the habit of meeting in the "Chiesa della Madonna" under the vault of the Hospital, where she used to give them rules of practical wisdom for every-day life. In the few sentences here selected is revealed the substance of her faith, the light of her charity, the beauty of her wishes and of her hopes:—

"Charity does not seek itself for itself, but itself for God, and not God for itself, but God for God. . . .

"Souls should be united and transformed by charity . . . Love begets love. . . .

"Every virtue takes its life from charity. . . .

"He who conforms to the Will of God finds peace. . .

"The real master is that of our spirit, the exterior is a loan.

"We must rise above ourselves. . . .

"He who rules others with his own weak self-love a timid, suspicious and calumnious servant. . . .

"He who in administering justice tries to please others, or fears to displease, so as not to injure himself, is a slave. . . .

"Many are the Pilates. . . .

"He who has no battle, has no victory and is put to confusion. . . .

"In time of battle we would give life for life, blood for blood. . . .

"To enjoy life eternal we must abandon the body before death comes, and the body abandons us. . . .

"Perfection does not consist in depressing and killing the body, but in killing our own wills. . . .

"Conscience with its own bark awakens the reason. . .

"I do not see that we can possess the light of intelligence without the pupil of the holiest faith which is inside the eye, and if this light is darkened or clouded by self-love the eye has no light, and therefore cannot see, so not seeing cannot know the truth. . . .

"Works are better than psalms. . . .

"As the feet bear the body so affection carries the soul. . . .

"No vice or sin in the whole world makes people feel the air of hell more than do anger and impatience. . .

"Impatience is self-love clothed in a sensitive will. . . .

"As charity has for its marrow patience, so impatience is the marrow of pride. . . .

"Pride dulls the intellect of man; from pride and vanity is bred dishonesty of mind and body. . . .

"The ground of self-will should be cultivated through force of love, which brings out the sweet and real virtues.

"When the garden is in flower, place there the dog of conscience, so that he may bark at enemies. . . .

"We must find among the thorns the perfume of the roses about to open. . . . "

These two last sayings were probably the result of her observations in the little farm, where she would see the watch-dog and the rose trees.

Each of her letters is a lesson of energy and of tenderness. In the midst of so many virile thoughts, actions, and feelings she always showed herself a true woman—a woman who pityingly drew to herself all there was of grief and sorrow. In the sixty-third letter of the "Tommaseo" edition, are found these words: "I have heard that thou hast had and hast, very great trouble . . . take to thyself all the comfort that thou canst. . . ." Here speaks the woman of calm human sympathy.

Certain it is that it was not without grave dangers that this fascinating woman leant over the abyss of earthly passions, being able to give her heart to all men whom she encountered, while keeping it pure and immaculate for her Lord. She disdained servile fear. She faced every danger heroically, and always remained victorious although sometimes tragically.

CHAPTER VIII

St. Catherine—A Tragedy in her Life

THE biographers of St. Catherine have never in fact made any observations regarding what was perhaps the very greatest tragedy of her intimate life—the bottomless despair into which—owing to the flame of an immense love for her—there fell a man who was amongst her dearest friends, and who, writing two letters to Pagliaresi[1] (the only two that have been preserved), did not even dare to give his own name, for in one of them he signs himself with the initials F.S., and in the other finishes up with the words: "I will not put down my name because I do not know what my name is."

Whoever reads these letters will see the intense suffering of a man's soul. To Pagliaresi, who, it seems, occasionally remembered him, and tried to comfort and brighten him, he wrote: "I marvel much how thou rememberest me, unhappy wretch that I am, because I am so much obsessed with my baseness, no longer enjoying the perfume which nourished me, that I have strayed from every good way. But know that had the time been better, and I could have found a little relief, I should not have been able to refrain from writing to thee oftener; besides, know that to write to thee or any other servant of God would shame me very much at present, considering my misery. May God keep thee and thy mother in His grace."

And in another letter we read this sincere confession: "I do not count myself any longer thy dear brother, nor

[1] Cf. F. Grottanelli, *Leggenda minore di S. Caterina da Siena e lettere dei suoi discepoli*. Scritture inedite, Bologna, Romagnoli, 1868.

brother to thy dear friends and brethren. And do not marvel if I do not write to thee, or if I never write to thee again until I return to gather the fruits of true obedience, of patience, and true humility. But it is so long since I have strayed from the true way that I think it is nearly an impossible thing to find or taste the aforesaid food, or come to a place of rest. And this has happened to me because I kept the eyes of my understanding shut up in darkness, and drove out the light of my soul, and that is why I am driven from the 'cenacolo.' I am now clothed in sadness and gloom. Hunger and longing for good things I no longer feel. I will neither begin nor end this letter because I cannot."

Do not these phrases, filled with despondency, darkness, cold and death, show the abandonment into which this soul had fallen? Perhaps Pagliaresi may have shown the letter to Catherine, the letter of a former friend, in which there trembled the pity and the remorse of despair; and we can well imagine the pain which must have filled that womanly heart, that heart which had wept over so many souls, when she knew that, although the souls of so many wicked, infamous men had been saved through her, she had to lose that of a friend. The unhappy man always spoke with a depth of remorse of the great blessing he had lost, in losing her friendship.

It is not possible to say exactly who this man was, seeing that he has wrapped himself up in silence. Perhaps he may be identified with that "Apostate" mentioned in the "Miracoli," who "first beginning with great zeal to desire her friendship, delighting himself greatly and marvelling at her holy life, after a certain time, being deceived by the Devil, turned his zeal into love, which base love was a dishonest zeal; but she, always persevering in her holy way and bearing no

semblance to anything but purity and holiness, never gave more to him than to any other, and this so enraged his base love and desires that he one day went into the church and, approaching her, hoped to kill her. As it pleased God, this intention was discovered by a man who was in the church, and was frustrated. Soon after, this wicked disciple left the 'cenacolo' and retired to his castle some way from Siena, where he lived half mad with despair.

"When the Saint knew that he had left them, she prayed to God for him that He would have mercy on his soul. Finally, the man, who still continued in his despair, hanged himself by the neck."

This tragic case, which makes of the Saint the heroine of a romance, might be believed to be only a legend, were it not for the fact that these two letters to Pagliaresi show the existence of a doleful drama of passion which really happened in the "Cenacolo Cateriniano."

Another man, Niccolò de Tuldo, a young Perugino, who was condemned to death for a political crime, which he declared he had not committed, was also enamoured of Catherine, but he conquered his earthly love and was able to meet death with joy.

In the *Leggenda minore* we read that: Tuldo, having received the greatest injustice, walked about his prison like a madman, he would not make his confession, nor listen to the priests who came to speak to him on the state of his soul. Finally the Virgin Catherine was asked if she would come, and with the greatest charity she went to the prison. Her words of comfort and encouragement were such that, as she says herself in the *Epistolario*, "Niccolo arrived at the place of execution like a gentle lamb, and seeing me there awaiting him he began to smile. He asked me to make the sign of the Cross

over him, and having done so I said to him, 'Hie thee upward to the marriage feast, sweet brother mine, soon thou wilt enter into life everlasting.' He knelt down with great meekness, and bending over him I spoke to him of the Blood of the Lamb. The only words he uttered were 'Jesus' and 'Catherine' and even as he said these words, I received his head in my hands, and fixing my mind on the goodness of God, I said 'I am willing.'"

Part V.

CHAPTER I

Bernardino degli Albizzeschi

BERNARDINO, a follower of St. Francis, was above all a man of action. He stands out prominently among the active Christians of the Quattrocento, as did St. Francis among those of the Trecento. Having imbibed many of the teachings of Colombini, he was at one time even suspected of heresy.

He was known as the "Educator," for most of his activities were directed towards the education of the youths of his day. His biographers have dwelt entirely on this aspect of his life, but he had also a deep mystic side to his character. This can even be seen in his picture.[1] His fine face is filled with a shrewd humorous expression, which is accentuated by the sharp chin and small bright eyes filled with life, which seem to give out a flame of ardour. But a still better picture of Bernardino is to be found in a terra-cotta bust, practically unknown, which until some years ago was to be found in a niche of the wall which surrounded the cloister of the Osservanza.

To see it at its best it should be in the open country about sunset, for the sculptor of this lovely terra-cotta seems to have pictured the Saint while he strolled thoughtfully and lonely along the poetic aisles of the monastery, to which he had returned from one of his tiring apostolic pilgrimages.

Bernardino has closed the book upon which he has been meditating, and has reclined his head on the palm

[1] See Illustration opposite.

PORTRAIT OF SAN BERNARDINO (GIOVANNI DI PIETRO), 15TH CENTURY.
PALAZZO MISCIATTELLI, ROME.

of his hand as if tired, abandoning his spirit to the sweetness of the place and the hour.

Forgotten are the troubles and enmities he has had to endure, and the heart of the "fraticello" lives only in the immense peace of Nature, which is the peace of Christ.

The humanity of this work of art is the real humanity of the fifteenth-century Sienese mysticism, which has got rid of those vain diabolical terrors of the simple Filippo degli Agazzari, as well as those apocalyptic visions of a Vincenzo Ferreri, and yet preserves in its heart the ancient force of the mediæval simplicity. Although it does not vibrate with the violent and loving frenzy of a Colombini, it still lives according to the teachings of Christ; does not subject the body to the cruel and hard mortification of a Franco Lippi; but is absolute master of its own sensitive will.

It was only through personal experience that Bernardino understood the vanity of that rigid ancient mysticism, towards which he felt drawn through reading the lives of some of the best mystics, and also because the generosity of his nature impelled him to a life of sacrifice. He was very young at the time when he tried to make this attempt, and he himself describes it in a page which is full of a delicious humour, and which reveals the first crisis in his religious life.

"One day there came to me the idea that I should live on herbs and water, and in order to do this I thought that I had better go and take up my abode in a wood. Then I started to ask myself questions: 'What wilt thou do in a wood? What wilt thou eat?' My reply was: 'I shall do exactly what the holy fathers did, of course; I shall eat herbs when I am hungry, and drink water when I am thirsty. It is quite simple.'

"So I decided to start on my new life. In order to know better the Will of God I bought a Bible which I could meditate upon in my wood, and to prevent it getting wet or soiled I bought a piece of chamois leather to cover it. Having made these preparations, my next step was to find a place where I could roost, so I went as far as Massa; and in the valley of Bochegiano I climbed first on the top of one hill and then on the top of another, to view the land. Having done this, I entered into a wood which appeared to be suitable, but then I thought I would try another, for all this time I was saying to myself as I looked around, 'That seems a very nice place—but that is a better place,' until I got so bewildered and confused, that I could not decide upon any place, and returned back to Siena.

"Still the idea of this hermit life would cling to me, so I decided to try again, and one day I went out as far as Follonica, where I gathered some sowthistles and other nasty herbs, with which to make a salad. Such a salad! There was neither salt nor oil, and no bread! However, I reasoned within myself. 'Now let us start this new life by washing and scraping the salad this first time, and another time we shall not wash it, but simply scrape it, and when we are accustomed to it we shall not scrape it, so that by degrees we shall arrive at such a point that we shall not even gather it . . .' So, in the Name of the Blessed Lord I started on my first mouthful and began to chew, *but it would not go down*, it remained solid in my mouth, and I said to myself: 'Well, well, let us begin to drink a little water to help it.' Down ran the water as if in a hurry to pass the salad, which still remained a fixture! I took gulp after gulp of water and yet that one mouthful of salad remained unswallowed!

"Shall I tell you something? One mouthful of

sowthistle took away from me every temptation to lead that kind of life, and certainly I do believe that it was a temptation, because that which followed was election and not temptation.

"How careful we should be to weigh well our desires, for some lead to evil and some to good."

. . . . . .

Is there not felt in these words a waft of that pure, simple fragrance which makes so gay the green meadows of the *Fioretti* of St. Francis, where we find the joyful humour of a Fra Ginepro; the heroism of a Fra Leone; the deep reflections of an Egidio; all merging into the luminous serenity of the Master of all harmony?

At any rate we find in Bernardino the wise moderation of a Saint of the Renaissance, experienced in life, with a profound knowledge of hearts, one who would never dream of pushing back his country into the Middle Ages, but brings forward the grave urgent problems of secular and religious education.

CHAPTER II

Bernardino as Educator

THE best types of Italian Catholicism in the fifteenth century were pre-eminently "Educators." In blazing forth this reformed classic culture, they opposed themselves to those pagan-like humanists,[1] who were full of literary frivolity, worthy ancestors of the French sceptics of the eighteenth century with the oratory of their materialistic doctrines and scoffers of ecclesiastical customs—hypocrites; forerunners of that typical personage of the pagan Renaissance—Pietro Aretino,—the prototype of unscrupulous journalists, the man who, taking advantage of the money of Charles V, was not ashamed to help in the moral and political ruin of Italy.

The greatest and loftiest souls of the Quattro- and Cinquecento did not in the least resembles these vain and cunning writers, but were conquered by the faith of the apostles and Christian instructors. To see this we have only to read their names: the two great artists, Leonardo and Michelangelo, deeply religious and divinely inspired; and among the humanists, Maffeo Vegio, Giannozzo Manetti, Traversari, Giustiniani, and among the princes, Lionello d'Este, whose teacher was the great Educator Guarino da Verona, who with Vittorino da Feltre rank among the very highest of Christian professors. Their teaching was such as to

[1] Some of these humanists violently attacked the Franciscan preachers of the Osservanza. Poggio amongst others did not even spare S. Bernardino, accusing him of seeking for fame more than saving souls. See his "*Historia convivialis de Avaritia*," "*Dialogus adversus hipocrisim*," "*Dialogus de miseria humanae conditionis*," "*Epistolae ed. Tonellis*." Especially see Poggio's epistle dated Dec. 16, 1429 (Book 4° Ep. III) where he accuses Bernardino of having founded a retreat for his followers near Florence in a pleasant country place, as if the true Franciscans ought to exclude the pure joys of Nature from their lives.

give to their students a firm foundation for a robust old age. They aimed at the education of the mind and of the heart. Both their physical and spiritual exercises were done seriously.

During their meals, lives of heroes, and accounts of heroic deeds, were read out to the youths; and during school hours everything was done to make the lessons pleasant and profitable, so there were no idle questions or wranglings, and Vittorino da Feltre desired that "Logic should teach to think and not spend itself in absurdities."

Guarino,[1] a true Christian Socrates, advised that his young disciples and friends should hold discussions on those books they read and studied, and he recommended purity of speech, calmness and strength in life, as also in their style of writing. In a letter to Niccolò Dotti he hurls his denunciations against those pedagogues who "waste time in figures, in cases, in gerunds and similar ravings: they labour to make their pupils twice more stupid and ignorant than they were before they went to school." Guarino taught his own students to live according to the maxims of the Gospel, and always corrected their faults with kindness, never having recourse to the stick.[2]

[1] It appears that Bernardino took lessons in elocution from Guarino. Cf. Thimothaeus Maffeus, *In Sanctam Religionem*, quoted by Mehus in the *Vita d'Ambrogio Traversari*, page 384, and Giovanni Pannonio, *Panegyrico Guarini*.

[2] San Bernardino was an enemy of the stick, which was in those days, one might say, the master of every educational discipline. Fra Cherubino dei Minori, a contemporary of Bernardino, who gave various rules of life to the Sienese in a treatise regarding matrimony, wrote: "If thy wife is of a servile condition, rough and bad-minded, and does not mend her ways with kindness, then take her with brusque words and also with harsh threats and terrors and other fears. And should this not suffice . . . take a stick and beat her soundly . . . I say thou shouldst beat thy wife when she commits grave faults such as cursing God or any Saint, or if she mention the Devil. . . ." San Bernardino gives different advice . . . "Either admonish her or help her, never beat her, try good and sweet words." *Pred.* tom. II, 103.

From the wealthy he extracted a small fee, but from the poor nothing—he lodged them in his own house, which was something like a private boarding school. Some of his pupils belonged to princely families.

The spirit of vendetta and intolerance which was so rife in the days of Bernardino and Guarino was hated by both men. Guarino also showed that it was possible to harmonise the rights of culture and beauty with Christian duties. A sermon preached by Fra Alberto da Sarzana in Ferrara gave Guarino great pleasure, because in it the preacher undertook to show how useful human science could be for the better understanding of sacred books, thus opposing himself to another preacher, Fra Giovanni da Prato, who wished all secular books to be burnt. This fact, together with many others, shows that there were two schools of thought existing even in the bosom of the Church, and also in the bosom of the Franciscan Order, at this time; the one modified by the good sense of a chief like Bernardino, the other "stiffened" and made more rigorous by a chief like Savonarola.

The height of the culture of Guarino, a culture which was the result of a Franciscan ideal of beauty, is revealed in Guarino's attitude when he received a volume of Panormita's poetry; for he praised unconditionally the artistic worth of the work, distinguishing between the aesthetic and the moral quality of the verses; showing for the first time—he, a man of rigid habits—the independence existing between Art and Morality. This unexpected attitude scandalised some of his friends, and caused much discussion and letter writing.

Guarino was also in favour of the liberal expansion of feminine activity in the sphere of culture. He was a supporter of Women's Rights. When a certain lady, Isotta Nogarola, one of his friends, complaining to him

one day of certain annoyances that she had undergone, lamented that Providence had caused her to be born a woman, Guarino replied, that if everybody thought as she did, everybody would be unhappy, "She ought on the contrary to be very happy and glad that she was born a woman, since she had been able to rise so much higher than other women in mind, study and doctrine; in fact, the knowledge of her own worth and powers ought, without making her proud, to make her superior to the derisions and teasings of the idle and spiteful."

When Guarino, who was the father of thirteen children died in 1490 at the age of ninety, he left many disciples, the majority of whom were amongst the most illustrious of the humanist Christians of that time.

CHAPTER III

The Humour of Bernardino

WE have previously had some glimpses of Bernardino's quality of mind in the autobiography already quoted, and further glimpses are revealed in his writings. Some of his narratives, which are lively and brimming over with grains of humoristic salt, running in and out through the maze of the simple beauty of the pure Sienese dialect, give us a key to the character of this complex and strange mystic.

Although aristocratic by birth, he entered so deeply into the democratic spirit of his day that he was able to speak in a language so effective, so plebeian—that is—plebeian in the best sense of the word—that the poor people were all able to understand him—a great help in reaching their hearts. How often our modern men use such ecclesiastical rhetoric, that they are not able to get into touch with the souls of the people!

Humour and sincerity sprang out of the narrations of Bernardino as from a well of good sense which does not shrink at sacrifices, but can look into them and value them. He was dominated by the classic sentiment of order—by moral limits—by civil duties, and especially by a spirit of peace and union, a spirit which makes for strength in a family, as it also does in a city and in a nation. Like St. Francis, renouncing in himself the ascetic idea of the individual, he also rejected the romantic idea, which isolated man from his kind. He advocated unity in his sermons, showing that union is strength. He says that

in a city all should be *Volontari a ben vivere*, and that from the order of contrasting elements in nature and in the human body come the order of social life. Charity is taught by the members of our body. "Thou seest the example of our body which is composed of many members, and when one of these members has a defect all do their best to help it. If the head aches, the hand hastens to it. Is it broken? the legs carry it to the doctor, and in this way each member helps as much as possible. He who helps not his members when they are defective are paralytics through the crime of not having compassion. Dost thou know who these are? They are those who do contrary to what they ought to do, they ought to help and they help not."

Like the other Sienese mystics Bernardino was a great lover of his city, a fervid nationalist, but not a blind one, and what is strange in a "frate," he was opposed to clericalism in daily affairs. He fought against the interfering of monks and priests in the affairs of the civil powers, holding firm to the words of Saint Paul to Timothy, Chapter III "Nemo militans Deo se implicat in opere saeculari" (No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life), and he would not admit that monks and priests could be more honest than laymen in the management of public money, as many ecclesiastics declared. This in fact he expresses in his thirty-eighth sermon:[1] "Neither should you civilians give offices to ecclesiastics, nor ought the ecclesiastics to seek or exercise them. The priests should not meddle in secular affairs. *No.*"

[1] It was usually a Cistercian monk who held the office of chamberlain in Siena, so San Bernardino's sermon inveighing against the interference of priests seemed very bold. The white robed Cistercian was often depicted on the covers of the Books of Biccherna, for he was the vigilant custodian of the wealth of the Commune.

He was troubled over the instability of mind of his fellow-citizens, who were just as prone to do good as to do evil, and were particularly feminine in character.

In the twenty-fifth sermon, where he treats at length on the civil order of the country, he explains clearly to the Sienese what were their defects, insisting on the seriousness with which each citizen ought to exercise his right to vote, which implied one of the most sacred of duties. "I believe," he said, "that you ought to consider well before you spend so much foolishly. I understand the weakness of your character. You leave a thing and then return to the same thing; and seeing you now in so many divisions, with so much ill-feeling, so many hatreds, I believe that, had it not been that you are very very human, you would have ended in doing yourselves some great harm. However, I say that your condition and you yourselves are very changeable, and how very changeable you are also with evil, for you soon return to good."[1]

With very fine psychological intuition, he picks out the two essential characteristerics of the Sienese mind, fickleness and humanity, qualities particular to a race excessively sensitive, just as strange as that which prevailed among them in the artistic sense, intuitive rather than reflective, unable to bear any yoke, admirable in their courage, in their dreams and in their follies.

Montluc calls the Sienese people, *Peuple de grands enfants*. Cardinal De Bellay says of Siena, *C'est une terrible beste que cette ville là, et sont estranges cerveaulx*.

But both are agreed with Bernardino in recognising the *human* value of Siena. And this Sienese humanity, how well is it expressed in the following exclamation of the Saint: "How strong and full of kindness is he

[1] *Prediche*, ediz. cit., tom. II, pp. 69, 70, 219.

who has passion rather than compassion for his neighbour!"

In one cry he unveils to us here his pure heroism, and we must remember that this was the place to show himself in actions not in words, because, when the pestilence was raging in Siena, Bernardino—then only twenty years old—at the head of a gallant voluntary band of ten of his companions, remained night and day during four months in the Hospital of the Scala helping with the sick.

CHAPTER IV

San Bernardino and Antichrist

SAN BERNARDINO, like the time in which he lived, belonged temperamentally both to the Middle Ages and to the Renaissance.

There was still dominant in Italy that feudal partisanship with the Guelph and Ghibelline parties, which tore with divisions and reprisals of blood both families and cities. Bernardino started a violent campaign against it, and his sermons are terrible in their denunciations. In the tenth sermon, preached on the Piazza del Campo in Siena, he exclaimed at one point: "Who is he who is blind and deaf? It is he who takes sides, and makes himself either Guelph or Ghibelline." He then proceeds to describe the horrible scenes of blood brought about by this partisanship.[1] "How many evils are produced, how many women killed in their own city, in their own houses; how many tortured. How many young boys killed through vengeance against their fathers. How many babes torn from their mothers, and their heads dashed against the wall. How many tortured and buried alive in a ditch. Some are thrown down from the towers, some from the bridges into the rivers. Women are taken and outraged in the presence of husbands and fathers, then each killed in the presence of the other. No mercy is shown until all have been killed."

In this description is seen mediæval fury, but there remained also in Bernardino himself (although perhaps he was unaware of it), some survival of the spirit of that

[1] *Prediche*, ediz. cit., tom. I, p. 252.

S. BERNARDINO PREACHING. NEROCCIO DI BARTOLOMEO, PALAZZO PUBBLICO, SIENA.

age of violence, and in his expression of strong hatreds and strong loves which we sometimes find breaking out, it seems as if the "Old man" in him were bursting through the calm Franciscan feelings of the "New man."

One day when preaching against factions, he was so excited by the force of his feelings, that a scorching eloquence of bitter words issued forth from his lips, words which are astonishing as coming from the mild, gentle Franciscan. These are portions of his sermon: "My Lord Jesus Christ, I pray Thee that if my father or my mother or any of my kindred should die in defence of one of these factions (Guelph or Ghibelline), I pray Thee that for their souls may not be said one mass; nor any prayers be offered that could be useful to them. I also pray Thee, my Lord, that if any of them belonged to a party up to the time of their death, and they have not confessed it—may a thousand devils take their souls and may there never be any redemption for them." . . .

There does not breathe forth much of the gentleness of the Gospel in these utterances! We very often find that when biographers have a blind admiration for the person about whom they write, they hide his defects in order to exalt his virtues, not taking into account that in every soul—even of the greatest of men—there are often strange discords. This is an old fault which official biographers of the Saints have never been quite unable to correct.

They have been afraid of breaking through the ancient custom—which was to surround the saints with an atmosphere of perfection. But in some contradictory psychological aspects in the character of Bernardino it is easier to understand his humanity. . . . If saints, like heroes, were perfect, then they would have

no points of resemblance with mankind, they would be superhuman.

The dominating quality of Bernardino was, as we have seen, an intense love for his neighbour. He had grown up in a house full of kindnesses, womanly modesty and delicate sensitiveness; so it appears incredible that he waged such fierce war against those wandering fortune-telling women whom the people regarded as witches. It may be that he was partly justified in this, because many of these fortune-tellers belonged to the lowest and most dangerous class of prostitutes, of whom there was an immense number in Rome during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. "They worked incantations, they went into the cemeteries to find charms with which to delude men. They drew out the teeth of those who had been hanged, stole their clothes and their hair. . . ."

It was not possible for Bernardino not to be influenced by the violence which saturated the atmosphere in which he lived, and if he did fall into certain excesses, it was owing to the sincere hatred he had for many of those medieval superstitions which had survived until his day, and which he was bent on destroying. In fact, he was the first and the true precursor of the Counter-reform.

More than once he preached against the worship of false relics,[1] and against the over zeal of certain spiritual fathers; and the follies of all visionaries.[2]

In the second of his Sienese sermons he tried to destroy the people's belief in the influence of the stars on the destiny of men. But his greatest triumph was over the belief in the imminent coming of Antichrist.

When preaching in Liguria and Piedmont, he had requently met San Vincenzo Ferreri and a certain Fra

[1] *Prediche*, ediz. cit., tom I. p. 238. [2] *Ibid.*, II. p. 377.

Manfredo, both of whom announced the near advent of Antichrist. Bernardino opposed himself to this preaching of terror, and took advantage of his own fine sense of humour to paralyse the disastrous effects of the sermons. His firm attitude in face of the celebrated Domenican preacher shows that he entered into the feelings of the Poverello of Assisi, as if he also in the bottom of his soul felt himself nearer to the canticle of "Brother Sun" than to the "Dies Irae." He says, "Even in the days of my childhood I used to hear that Antichrist had been born, so what can I say? In the days of the Apostles it was said that he had been born, and again in the days of San Bernardo. And so to-day we again hear it, and a short while ago it was most positively affirmed that he was born. Alas! what madness is this on the part of those who want to know more than God Almightly wishes them to know?

"Who is he that does know? No creature on earth can know it, and the Lord Jesus Christ did not wish to tell His disciples. And Christ Himself as *man* did not know it. . . ."

And in another place, emphasising still more his own modern views, he exclaims: "Antichrist will never come —*unless there be a silence in our faith*; and in this one phrase he annihilates the personal importance of that mythical personage, in order to remind them of the peril which was being done to the Christian Faith through silence, that is through spiritual death, which is the real Antichrist.

The theological world of S. Bernardino is one of the most subjective, although appearing to conform itself always to a sentiment of respectful orthodoxy.

But no modern Roman theologian would approve of some of the advice which he gave to his Sienese listeners,

especially that of omitting the Sunday obligation of hearing Mass rather than that of hearing the sermon.

S. Bernardino was a convinced anti-formalist. He always aimed at arriving at the essence of things. His teaching was that before the Mass came the sermon, but before the sermon came the house—the social and family duties. He was never too much impressed by the life of excessive contemplation, but always aimed at living worthily the civil life.

"Hast thou any sick in thy house? Yes. Dost thou not know the good thy care does? Leave not the sick in order to come to the preaching. Hast thou children? Yes. Leave not those who have need of thee, in order to come to the preaching. Hast thou a husband and children who need to be cared for, and provided for in all that pertains to the family? Yes. Do it, and do not leave them so as to come to the preaching; first of all do all that thou oughtest in the governing of thy house, and then come to the sermon; for if thou didst not do for thy family those things which they need, I would not praise thee for coming to church to bow thyself before the Altar."[2] This is the substance of a Franciscan life.

He expresses his views on the life of contemplation by the question: "Knowest thou when they head leaves thy body?" "When thou leavest the active life to enter on the contemplative life." This is an instance of pure Bernardine humour.

In reading the stories and the apologues collected in the volume of his sermons by Zambrini, one sees this humour, which refreshed the ancient truth, and made a smile come over the withered fragrance of its faith and hope. Humour is like salt, preserving a work from the corruption

[1] *Prediche*, ediz. cit. tom. I, p. 66. [2] *Prediche*, ediz. cit. tom. I, p. 43.

of that weariness which one feels so often in the moral teachings of certain preachers. The humour of Bernardino was endowed with that Anglo-Saxon sense of humour which Thackeray means, when he says that the humorist is he who more especially "awakens and directs our love, our pity, our goodness, our disdain for lying, false pretensions and hypocrisy, our compassion for the weak, the poor, the oppressed, the unhappy."

So as to enable him to speak openly and sincerely S. Bernardino kept far away from all ecclesiastical honours, and refused to be made bishop of the city.[1] He speaks of this in his eighteenth sermon: "Had I come (to Siena) as you wished, that is, as your Bishop, my mouth would have been half shut. See, in this way,[2] so that I could only have spoken with my mouth shut. But I preferred to come as you now see me, in order to speak openly; and thus I can say whatever I like, and just as it suits me to speak of things."[3]

This need of sincerity he sought to inculcate into the character of his fellow-citizens, so as to reanimate them; for he foresaw against which rock the splendid ship of the Renaissance, laden with so much intelligence, would soon be wrecked.

If a nation does not possess a majority of straight, strong, honest characters, it becomes sooner or later the slave, politically and spiritually, of the foreigner. And with what grief did S. Bernardino see the lack of loyalty in his Tuscans, of whom he says: "Whether a Tuscan promises or does not promise, he does just what suits him best."[4]

He also deplored the dishonesty of many Italians in com-

[1] The offer of the Bishopric of Siena was made to Bernardino on June 4th, 1427 by the Pope, Martin V.

[2] He gave more force to his saying by closing his lips tightly.

[3] See Illustration. [4] *Prediche*, ediz. cit. tom. III, p. 168, etc.

merce, frequently dwelling upon it in his sermons; and with subtle discernment he joined to these frauds the cupidity of man with his excessive usury, and also the vanity of women.

In his wonderful thirty-seventh sermon he treats of worldly vanity, and thus apostrophises the fathers of the families of Siena: "Thou givest thy daughter to one as his wife, and neither he who takes her, nor the father, nor the mother gives any thought as to where her goods come from. If they were wise, that is the first thing they should find out, as to where the goods and clothes come from, and how the girl's dowry has been acquired. For many times and most times it has been acquired by robbery, usury, or the sweat of the peasants, the blood of the widows, and the marrow of the minors and orphans. Should some of these robes be taken, squeezed, and wrung, thou wouldest see the blood of human beings oozing out of them."

Amongst the chief social reforms that Bernardino promoted and obtained were the following:—

"The formation of associations for assisting prisoners.

"The instituting of a campaign against usurers, resulting in the drawing up of statutory restraints against them in several cities.

"The abolition of that barbarous custom existing in Rome, in Perugia, and other cities of Italy, by which a man, if he killed his political enemy and placed a bar of iron across his door, acquired the right of immunity from *public* justice, although it was lawful for the friends and relatives of the murdered man to assail and kill the murderer in his own house."

But the noblest and most glorious campaign that he waged, was that for the rights of the spirit—of the soul. While the spirit of materialism was spreading

more and more in the country, defiling the lives of his contemporaries, he never ceased reaffirming the laws of the "spiritual kingdom," crying out: "The soul is above all earthly things, above it are the angels. . . And thus was the soul conceived."[1]

"The soul is like a city, square like this pulpit, having four gates or doors, one to the East, one to the West, one to the South and one to the North, and nobody can enter it except by one of these doors. And I may liken these four gates to four sentiments that the soul always possesses, and without which nobody can exist.

"We start at the Eastern gate, and before this we ask the question: What does enjoyment mean? And the reply is: That the soul loves nothing according to the world, but all his joy and gladness is found in God.

"The second gate—that of the West—is that of grief. Entering by this, nobody can ever be in sorrow whatever happens, if living according to the Will of God, and not according to the world. Unless this is the rule of his life, everything turns out badly.

"The third gate, the South, is that of hope. He who enters by this must have no hope in worldly things, his hope must be in God alone, otherwise things go badly; his hope must be *in* God and *through* God.

"The fourth gate is the Northern gate, that of timidity, and every time that fear, which is other than the fear of God enters the soul, all the works of man go badly."

This reduces all the affections and the will of the spirit into one supreme perfection in God, that is into the Absolutely Just. This appeared to Bernardino the greatest guarantee of a fraternal social life. He wanted the soul to be united to God "as light in the air makes itself one with it." But this was not possible without

[1] *Prediche*, ediz. cit. tom. I, pp. 44–45.

a living and strong faith, able to draw the will to an heroic effort. For this reason he sought to re-awaken in man's soul the Christ, and pointing to the Cross he revealed its symbolic meaning:—

"The Cross has two pieces of wood, one goes across, the other above.

"Dost thou know what these mean in a virtuous man? The one across means labour, the upright one means virtue, and if thou art wanting in either of these two, thou hast lost everything and art quite unable to understand anything."[1]

Appendix

While these sermons of Bernardino were being preached on the Piazza of the Campo of Siena in 1427 they were taken down word for word, and in a publication of them by Banchi we read in the prologue of a certain Maestro Bartolomeo, cloth weaver, who "Having a wife and children, and having few goods and many virtues, left his work for the time being, collected and wrote all these sermons word for word, not leaving out a single word that was preached . . . Being present at the sermon he wrote on wax tablets with a stylus, and having heard the sermon he returned to his shop and wrote it all out, copying from the wax tablet, so that in one day he wrote the sermon twice—as well as doing his work; such a thing was marvellous" said the writer in his prologue, "and he did not omit a single syllable of that which came from those sacred lips, even as we see in this present book."

The first sermon preached by S. Bernardino was in Siena in the Oratory of S. Onofrio, on June 11th, 1405 (Cf. Sigis. Tizio *Hist. Sen.* M.S. in the Bibliotheca Com. di Siena, Vol. IV, 53). He was then twenty-five years old.

[1] *Prediche*, ediz. cit. tom. II, p. 205.

FRESCO OF SAN BERNARDINO. SANO DI PIETRO, 15TH CENTURY. COMMUNAL PALACE, SIENA.

A second time he preached in the Duomo in 1410, as appears in 242 of "Libro Rosso," 1404–1415 (preserved in the Archives of the Duomo). He returned to preach in Siena on the Piazza of S. Francesco(?)[1] from May 1st to June 10th, 1425 (Cp. Cronaca cit. Aldob. Bibli. Com. di Siena Cod. A, VI, 9.c. 128). The Commune ordered in June, 1425, that there should be placed on the façade of the Palazza Pubblico, the Name of Jesus in gilded copper on a background of ultramarine blue, as seen today, and also had the Name painted in the Sala del Mappamondo. The sermons published by Banchi were preached in the Piazza from August 14th to the end of September, 1427.

[1] See Illustration.

Part VI.

CHAPTER I

Brandano—The Fool of Christ

BRANDANO is a unique characteristic figure of a prophet of the people, and the accounts that we have of his life are necessarily a mixture of legend and truth.

He lived during a tempest of furious passions and conflicts, of strife and of odium, which at that time raged in Siena. His fellow-citizens, in spite of the Roman Curia, persisted in calling him "Beato," for in doing this they showed their faith in him as a prophet and as a defender of their liberties, and at the same time proclaimed through him their faith in God as their Deliverer, and the Protector of the Republic.

Both the Pope Clement VII and the Emperor Charles V were at that time trying to violate the liberties of Siena, and the tenacious hatred which Brandano showed towards them knew no bounds.

In spite of the passionate love which he bore to Christ, he does not remind us of any of the Christian Saints, for the violence of his threats, and of his acts of penitence, are more Judaic than Christian. The condition of Siena resembled that of the Old Testament times, when the prophets were wont to hurl their denunciations against the enemy, so that we can understand how this mystic, with an implacably proud and harsh spirit of intolerance, poured forth his vials of wrath against all who tried to oppress his well-beloved city.

The Sienese mystics were all violent; Catherine Benincasa in her charity; Colombini in his social work; S. Bernardino in his preaching; and Brandano in his tirades against the oppressors. All used the same language towards both lowly and proud, a language frank, rough, imperative. From the Maiden Catherine down to Lazzaretti[1] they all held their own lives as of no consequence when it meant sacrificing them for the good of others, and it was the beauty of this offer of sacrifice, this readiness to shed their blood as the price of victory for their beloved city, that drew the people to them, and gave them such power and ascendancy over their minds. All or nearly all passed through the flames of heresy, but not one of them showed his love for Siena so violently as did Brandano, this type of vigorous, original and mystic personality.

We have not the least doubt but that he was highly appreciated in his own city, and it is recorded that he had the "gift of prophecy," in fact, in the memoirs of the "Company of the Madonna" (written shortly after his death), he is given the title of "Beato."

The people believed him to be a saint, and when his body was borne from the house of Buoninsegni, where he died, to the Church of San Martino, where he was buried with many honours, there was an immense throng of persons who fought for pieces of his robes to keep as relics, and these they always held in great sanctity. The Archbishop Camillo Borghesi in 1612 published an edict in which he exhorted the faithful to venerate Brandano as "Beato" (Blessed).

To-day the memory of the popular prophet who seemed to nourish in his despised body the soul of the

[1] *Re* Davide Lazzaretti and "Lazzarettismo," which still exists in the mountain of St. Flora, see an article in *La Voce*, anno I, Dec. 2, 1909.

dying Republic is well nigh forgotten, and even his name is used as a mark of contempt, for in the popular tongue: *Va là sei un Brandano* means "Go away, ragamuffin."

The poorness of the garb in which he gloried, and which was formerly a symbol of sancitity, is now a synonym for degradation. There is a bust of him by an unknown author in the "Opera del Duomo" of Siena,[1] and one sees something of the Michelangelo touch in that thin rugged face with the eyes full of martyrdom; the strong nose, and the full beard. He has a stern and disdainful mien, and seems to be saying the rough words which are written on the pedestal of the bust:—

Ricordatevi che dovete morire
Per voi non vi è altro che Paradiso o l'Inferno.
Averete il Paradiso se operate bene,
Averete l'Inferno se operate male.

(Remember that thou must die.
For thee there is only Paradise or Hell.
If thou dost well Paradise will be thy portion, if not—
Hell.)

In the *Confessions of Brandano*[2] we find a written description of him, which seems to resemble the painting by Anselmo Carosi, which is preserved in the Sacristy of the Chiesa di Provenzano. In the *Confessions* we read: "His hair was long and his expression severe, his countenance rugged. In height and gestures and habits he resembled the apostles of Jesus Christ, and he imitated them in penitence."

The youth of Brandano, like that of many other saints, had been a very irreligious one; he was a great swearer

[1] See Illustration.
[2] See Cod. K, VIII, 55, Bibl. Com. di Siena.

RICORDATEVI, CHE DOVETE MORIRE.
PER VOI NON VI È ALTRO CHE IL PARADISO
Ò L. INFERNO.
AVERETE IL PARADISO SE OPERARETE
BEN
AVERETE L. INFERNO, SE OPERARETE
MALE.

BRANDANO. THE FOOL OF CHRIST

REMEMBER THAT THOU MUST DIE;
FOR THEE THERE IS ONLY PARADISE OR HELL,
PARADISE WILL BE THINE IF THOU DOEST WELL,
HELL IF THOU DOEST ILL

and a vicious gambler, but one day when he was thirty-eight years old, while tilling the ground, a stone struck his left eye, blinding it. This so stunned and alarmed him that he began to think seriously, and there was born in him a strong and altogether sudden desire to change his life, "so as to serve the Lord faithfully."

Another mystic, Franco Lippi, had during the first half of the thirteenth century been converted after a somewhat similar experience, and to punish himself for his youthful sins had subjected his body to the most terrible martyrdom. He sowed his cell with thorns and nails, over which he would walk barefooted a part of each day. On his head he placed a helmet with iron bands, and over his flagellated back he wore a heavy coat of mail. It is incredible the ferocity these primitive Sienese practised on themselves, and we have only to read the lives of penitent hermits and the chronicles of Lecceto, to see the height of ascetic folly to which they attained.

Many men, obsessed by the voluptuousness of penitence, took refuge in the Monastery of Lecceto, where flourished those miracles and legends mentioned in the *Assempri* of Fra Filippo degli Agazzari.

Beato Antonio Patrizi, who died in 1230, was buried under the eaves of a roof in the cemetery of the monastery, and it was said that every year a lily grew out of his mouth. Pietro dei Rossi and his companion, Giovanni Incontri, spent there the whole of their lives meditating on the passion of Christ. Their faces were worn away with the tears which they shed. They were only seen to laugh once, after which they fell down dead.

St. Catherine was the first to shake the hermits of Lecceto out of the stagnant pool of their unfruitful mysticism, exhorting the Beato Felice dei Tancredi and

the Beato Giovanni Tantucci to issue forth from the desert and preach the Word of God.

But still the old mystical forms of penitence had not disappeared in Siena, so Brandano chose to follow the example of the primitive monks, especially Franco Lippi, in the discipline of his flesh, while resembling San Bernardino in his oratorical fervour.

He possessed a prophetic spirit, united to a wonderful patriotism, both the result of the political and religious conditions of the time. He brandished the torch of prophecy to defend his country against the foreigner.

During those years of slow and tragic agony endured by the glorious Republic, the work of Brandano and even his obscure warnings, pervaded by grief, are not without a mysterious significance for those who study them in conjunction with the events which followed. His prophecy of the imminent disaster which would fall on Italy because of her moral weakness, was verily fulfilled.

Brandano believed himself to be a living figure of Christ. One of his first sermons after his half-yearly retreat to Montefollonica hit hard the unworthy priests, who were so exasperated that they roused the whole body of clerics against him, just as Christ had drawn upon Himself the hatred of the Synagogue. He was beaten with sticks and driven out of Celle and San Casciano. One day he arrived at Radicofani, and in his *Confessions* he describes the scene. "It was a Friday, and seeing me tired and buffeted the people of the place received me kindly. My sweet Jesus inspired me to believe that on that day I should be near death. When they brought me some food, I said to them: 'You feast me and yet betray me.' They replied: 'Bartolomeo, have no fear of anything; we are not like those of Celle and San Casciano.' Moved with pity on seeing my nakedness, a soldier

put on me a white shirt, and as he did so I exclaimed with fear: 'This is the purple robe!' But they told me not to fear and mocked me. Then one of the soldiers, taking a pair of scissors cut my hair in the form of a cross." And this was the consecration of the Fool of Christ.

Padre Landucci of the Monastery of Lecceto recalls how Brandano "begged the honour of taking the part of the penitent thief on a certain Good Friday, for it was at that time customary to represent the actual Passion of the Saviour. Having obtained permission, and being placed upon the Cross, he did nothing but weep, and so copious were his tears that the ground all around was soaked." When taken down from the Cross he covered his nakedness with sackcloth, and each day at dawn he would issue forth barefooted from his home at Petroio, to exhort the people to be converted, beating his breast with a stone until the blood gushed out. This form of penitence, which was like that of S. Girolamo, was probably the result of continual contemplation of the figure of the Saint which was seen in the pictures of contemporary painters. Yielding his body to still greater fasts and harder acts of penitence, he gradually began to feel himself possessed of prophetic powers; and acquiring a consciousness that he had a mysterious mission to fulfil, he gave himself up to indefatigable preaching.

In the pulpits of the churches, on the walls of streets and squares, especially where many persons collected together for feasts or markets, there could be seen the strange figure of a man, who, beating his breast with a stone, preached to the crowds. He always carried about with him the Text of the Gospels, and, as he was not able to read, he would ask any priest who happened to be passing to read out the Gospel for the day; then he would

preach his sermon, holding the attention of the people for two or three hours at a time. In his right hand he held a brass crucifix with the figures of the two Marys, as seen in the picture in San Provenzano, and in his left a mask of death; around his neck a rope. His whole aspect was terrible, with the pale, drawn face in which the deep sunken eyes blazed forth, while he announced to his listeners, in a thundering voice, the woes and terrors of a Divine exterminating Wrath. He was made a target for ridicule by many, and insults were heaped upon him, but he rejoiced in them. The majority of the Sienese, however, saw in him a messenger of God; an avenger of their city, which was at that time encircled by Papal and Spanish troops. They delighted themselves in him; and they exalted him with their admiration; an admiration which was the result of religious fear and also of patriotic enthusiasm.

CHAPTER II

Brandano's Violent Preaching

AFTER the fall of the faction of the "Nove," the popular party in Siena, together with other Orders of the Gentiluomini, the Reformatori and the Dodici, joined by the lower classes, resolved that they would henceforth live according to the laws of ancient liberty, and never more yield themselves to any tyranny after their sad experience of Petrucci.[1]

The "Grandi,"[2] however, having been driven out of power, went and visited all the Courts of Europe to try and excite the Princes against their own city, Siena. Clement VII, who was eager to subject the city, and place his own family at the head, hearkened to them, and in 1526 the armies of the Pontiff, assisted by the Florentines, began to lay siege to Siena. During those days of peril Brandano encouraged the Sienese in their resistance, predicting to them a victory. In fact the few but valiant people conquered their assailants in a pitched battle, and Brandano was obliged to flee away to avoid the popular enthusiasm which ensued. He went straight to Rome, where he began to preach in all the squares, prophesying terrible chastisements which were to fall upon the enemy city Rome and upon Clement. Fra Mariano Fedeli, who was Brandano's confessor, relates

[1] Petrucci Pandolfo, who lived during the reign of Lorenzo dei Medici and who was his friend, attempted to capture Siena and become his tyrannical governor. He caused Nicolo Borghesi, his kinsman, to be assassinated because he defended the liberties of the Republic.

[2] The "Grandi" was a group of feudal families of "Longobardo" origin who had established themselves in Siena, where they held powerful positions prior to the rife of the "Nove," that is of the new "Borghesia" consisting of merchants and bankers. See page 3.

in his *Life of Brandano* the following incident which Brandano had dictated to him. "One morning, inspired by Our Lord, I went into a churchyard and collected an armful of the shin bones of the dead, which I carried to the steps which the Pope had to climb when going to say Mass at San Pietro. I presented a bone to each of the Cardinals and one I also offered to the Pope. But he turning from it with disgust, I threw it down at his feet, telling him that he ought to turn to God for pardon, for everyone must gnaw his bone (meditate on his own shortcomings). As I was descending the steps of San Pietro, certain bad men, or perhaps some of the Court, bound me and dragged me to the prison of Tor di Nona. I remained there some time, always preaching the Word of God to the prisoners. Very early one morning they took me away bound in a sack, and I knew not whither I was being carried, until I felt myself thrown into the river. I could hear the cries of the people in the streets so I knew I was being carried to my death. The sack was weighted, and I felt I was sinking, when I prayed to God, and putting forth my hands I found the sack had opened miraculously and I had been thrown on the bank. Having remained some time unconscious, I found I was at San Paolo with the sack still around me and I was covered with mud. I then began to walk along the road and met the Pope, who was going to the Seven Churches. He looked at me with great bewilderment, and I told him boldly how great was the wrath of God against him; then I reproved him, and prophesied that his earthly happiness was over. But he was so full of anger against me, that he immediately gave orders for me to be put into prison."

The Pope, however, soon had him liberated from prison saying: "If he is mad, it is madness to harm him, but if he is a good man and pleasing to God, it is worse to ill-

treat him." These sensible words of the Pope are quoted by Angelo Bardi, who was a contemporary of Brandano, in a history of Siena.[1]

From henceforth the prophet was allowed to follow his usual life, and he never ceased preaching against Rome and the Pope, always prophesying what fearful calamities they would suffer. In fact, just one year later the Imperial troops sacked Rome and took the Pope prisoner! Even when the Pontiff fled for refuge to Orvieto, Brandano followed him, trying to persuade the Orvietans to drive him out as an "author of ruin." So great was the persecution, that Clement exclaimed: *Potest ne facere Deus quod Senenses me persequantur ubique.* (Can it be that it is the Will of God that the Sienese should follow me everywhere.)

Brandano's hatred of Clement was by no means equal to that which he felt towards the Spaniards, for they also were enemies of his beloved city. An ancient chronicler narrates that, when Mendoza led into Siena the Spanish garrison, he saw the prophet, who went about the city with his eyes bathed in tears. When the people asked him why he wept, he replied that he was blinded with the smoke then prevailing in Siena, which if the wind did not change would destroy her, alluding to the pride, arrogance and vainglory of the Spaniards, who, if not driven away would bring the city to ruin. Infuriated he shouted out: "Siena, thou hast placed the mouse in the purse, it will gnaw the fastening, the purse will burst open, and no money will be left within."

The Commander, Don Diego di Mendoza, was the direct object of his hate. He used to follow him about the streets crying out the doggerel: *Don Diego, Don Diego ti cacceranno le donne con le canne.* (Don Diego, Don

[1] An unpublished work.

Diego, the women will chase thee with canes.) He was frequently punished and imprisoned, but to no purpose; he still continued to incite the Sienese, and one day he even went so far as to try to kill Mendoza. Carrying two stones he went to the camp of the Spaniards, and seeing a figure dressed in red, which he took to be that of the commander, he threw his stones, which struck a soldier. Being asked why he had tried to kill the man, he calmly replied: "Pardon me for my mistake, I thought that it was Don Diego." Asked why he wished to kill Don Diego, he said: "Because I will not that he should do evil to the city of my people, who do not deserve to be ill-treated."[1] The Captain, not daring to put him to death for fear of the populace, sentenced him to exile.[2]

On another occasion he came into conflict with the Spaniards. One of their captains—Morone—was urging on the builders of the fortress which the Spaniards were erecting to strengthen their position. He was beating them with his stick to make them work faster, and Brandano, seeing it, said: "Work as much as you like, you will never see this fortress finished," and turning to the workmen he reproved them for helping in such work. The captain then turned on him, driving him away, but Brandano, nothing daunted, foretold that before the day ended the captain himself would die. Both prophecies were fulfilled—the captain *did* die, and the Spaniards did *not* finish building the fortress, for the Sienese, helped by the King of France, drove them out in 1552, and pulled down the fortress, leaving only that side which still forms part of the façade of the city wall.

[1] Cf. *Diario delle cose avvenute in Siena dal Luglio* 1550 *al Giugno* 1555. A Sozzini, Florence, Vieusseux, 1842.

[2] Among the *Deliberati dei Dieci Conservatori* it is confirmed that a ban of three months' exile was placed on Brandano, on March 9th, 1547. See *Archivio di Stato di Siena.*

CHAPTER III

Brandano and the Women of Siena

THE Emperor Charles V was so enraged at the losses suffered by his armies, that he would have immediately waged war on the Sienese, had he not been prevented for a time by troubles in his own country, which occupied all his attention. But the die was cast, and there could be no more peace between the Sienese and the Emperor. When the city[1] was besieged, the Sienese, who had for many years been torn with divisions and internal disputes, rose up as if by a miracle to confront a common enemy, and re-conquered all at once those most heroic energies of their ancient power. One cannot read without admiration those pages of the history of that time, much of which has never yet been published, telling of the trials and conflicts, the courage and heroism that this little Tuscan city experienced; and the glorious beauty of this heroism is wonderfully depicted in a picture by Aldi, which is found in the Capitol in Rome.

During those days there was seen shining forth the light of a "Caterina" splendour in the conduct of the women of Siena. This cannot be better described than in the words of Marshal Montluc: "I shall never stop, oh women of Siena, immortalising your name, no, not so long as a book of Montluc exists. You are verily worthy of immortal praise if anyone was ever worthy! When

[1] See Illustration.

the splendid resolution of resisting the enemy was first mentioned, and everybody was resolved to defend the liberty of the city, the women formed themselves into three divisions. The first division was led by the Lady Forteguerri, and she and all her company were dressed in violet, their dresses being made in the fashion of those of nymphs, reaching half way down the leg. The second division, led by the Lady Piccolomini, was dressed in flesh-coloured satin. The third, led by Livia Fausti, was robed in white, and so were those who followed with the white banner. On the banners were various beautiful designs, and I would pay much if I could remember all of them.

"These squadrons were made up of three thousand women, composed partly of the nobles, partly of the people. Their weapons were hatchets, shovels, faggots and baskets, and with these they made their exhibition of strength, and went forth to start building the fortifications. In order to impart courage and enthusiasm among the people, singers were placed in various parts of the divisions, and their singing of patriotic songs roused and encouraged the people in the defence of their liberty. Il Signore di Termes, who often described to me this scene (for I had not yet reached the city), assured me that never in his life had he seen a more beautiful spectacle."

During this siege an ardent exiled Florentine republican, Piero Strozzi, fought valiantly for the Sienese. He was a gallant but unfortunate champion, for, in one of the most important encounters at Scannagallo, even the French horsemen of the allied army betrayed him, and took refuge in an ignominious flight.

The "contadini" of this contrada still recall in the verses of a doleful ballad that day of blood, and while

labouring in their fields they can be heard singing in the twilight these mournful words:—

Meglio de' vili cavalli di Franza
Le nostre donne fecero provanza.

(How much better did our women assist than the vile horsemen of France.)

And of Strozzi they sing:—

Col ferro, co' piedi
Caduti nel fosso
Ci vennero addosso,
Che l'acqua non corse
Se rossa non era,
O Pietro di Strozzi
Ferito nel fianco
Da palla nemica
Fra gli urgli e i singhiozzi
D' amara fatica
Morire volevi,
E non il potevi,

lamenting his death "who struck by the bullet of an enemy was left to die by the vile 'cavalli' of France."

In the diary of Alessandro Sozzini[1] we read of an episode that gives us an idea of the strong and gay-hearted defenders of the city: "One day during a truce the young men went into the Campo, and for over two hours played a magnificent game of Pallone (football), then they were all called up to go to their different 'Terzi' where they had a game of Pugna (boxing), which Monsignore Montluc enjoyed so much that he nearly wept at the sight, for he said he had never seen such brave youths. When the game was ended, a voice was heard crying, 'To arms, To arms!' And off they all went to continue the real fighting."

[1] Diary of events in Siena from July 20, 1550 to June 27, 1555. Written by A. Sozzini, Florence, Viesseux 1842.

Montluc adds: "I wish to give this praise to the Sienese. It is true before God that I never found a man young or old, who stayed at home and did not take up arms."

In his Commentaries, Montluc, recording the attitude of the frightened Romans when the Duke of Alba was nearing Rome, says: "Rather would I choose to defend Siena with only Sienese women, than to defend Rome with the Romans of the present day."

These deeds of heroism are still remembered in the popular songs of the country folk, where the deeds of the first saint and Sienese martyr—the soldier Vittorio,—and the last martyr—Brandano—are extolled and treasured.

The first was a martyr of the faith, a prophet of glory, the last a martyr of penitence and a prophet of death.

Better than many wise men this "Fool of Christ" had been able to discern in the lack of moral discipline, in the fratricides, discords and fatal conflicts which existed between France, the Empire, and the greedy temporising of the Church, what were in reality the chief causes of the ruin not only of the Republic but of Italy itself.

The old prophet, crushed by the sufferings and persecutions he had undergone, refrained from more threatenings, for he was now filled with a bright hope which flashed into his heart with the advent of Giulio III, who was elected Pope in 1551, at a time when Siena was in the midst of her misery. He hoped to find in the new Pope a friend to his dearly-loved city, and, moved by Christian charity and love of country, he wrote a letter to the new Pontiff, the splendid, noble document of a patriot and an apostle of reform, a letter now published for the first time, and which is among the most human and virile epistles of the sixteenth century.[1]

[1] Cf. Cod. cit. della Bibl. Com. di Siena.

"I, Bartolomeo Brandano, write to thee, Holy Father, Pope Giulio, Pastor of the great Christian flock, to say how much thou shouldest watch over thy sheep, so that they do not go astray through thy negligence, for thou wilt have to appear before the great living Pastor to give strict account of thyself and of the sheep who are lost through being deprived of the true wisdom and light which thou art bound to give them, being thyself in the place of Christ, Who has given to thee the keys to open and shut the door of Paradise, and when the Shepherd sleeps, he loses the key, and also loses the means of opening the door.

"Understand, Holy Father, thou must possess that living wisdom which binds men to God in peace and unity, that wisdom which was possessed by the glorious San Pietro, San Silvestro and San Gregorio. Verily they were real shepherds of souls, like the living Shepherd, who gained many souls to Him, showing to the sheep the right way, placing them in living pastures with holy fresh perfumed herbs full of beauty, and they led them to living fountains of water, where they could always dwell, where they had no more thirst, and no more hunger. This is my longing and desire also for thee, that thou mightest be filled with the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit and the Seven works of Mercy, that thou mayest be a good dispenser of those treasures committed to thee by Christ, so that before God thou mayest be able to walk joyfully. Oh Holy Father, sweet Pastor, thou seest the great dangers in which the poor creatures of the Creator are placed, because of the negligence of the Pastors who should be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Everything becomes bad when they neglect their duties. Be thou watchful! Awaken, oh Holy Father, and pray the Eternal God to open thy mind

to understand the Scriptures, and to know the way in which thou must walk, so as to guide thy flock to a safe place. It belongs to thee to be all charity, and to place holy peace between the King of France and the Emperor, showing above all the fear of God, and that glorious Truth which, coming down from Heaven to earth, has bought us with His Precious Blood.

"Alas! I see quite the contrary to-day; the God of the belly is worshipped, and each person takes for himself the glory of God, and Peace and Goodwill have returned to Heaven, and are no more found on earth, where each person lies in the shadow of death. Alas! how much account must be rendered to God!

"Last year thy wretched nephew[1] was here in Siena, and how much cruelty did he show, and how many deaths did he cause, and before God thou art guilty. I told thy mother Rome to pray for her son, I warn thee, Holy Father and Shepherd, never to take action against the ancient City of Siena, for she is the city of the High Queen, who has guarded and kept her, and will still do so, and whoever comes against her, will return unhappy. . . I prophesy this, Holy Father, that this encampment around Siena will be removed with great grief and great sadness, and that very soon; Holy Father, open the ears of thy mind to Jesus Christ, ask for those great and Divine treasures, which thou hast to dispense from that Fount of Living Faith and Living Hope. Tremble, tremble, as an old man does in the water, and pray that thou hast no greater weakness than had Pope Clement.

"From the East and from the West there will come so many people, and also from the South, all turning towards

[1] This is thought to be Ascanio della Cornia, who commanded the Italian troops in the Imperial army, and being wounded was put into prison in Siena by Pietro Strozzi, but out of respect to the Pope he was treated with every consideration. Cf. *Diario cit. di A. Sozzini.*

the Great Ancient Mother who is so embroiled in this world. . . . Woe to the Pope; woe to the Cardinals; woe to the living that eat the bread of Grief. Fear! Tremble! Tremble and make this holy peace between the Emperor and the King of France. . . . God will give thee power, and Jesus Christ the Living Shepherd will guide thee into the right way, and will teach thee how to gather good fruit, so that we may all enjoy Paradise. Amen."

The popular apostle wished to spend the last years of his life in his well-loved native city. He wanted to settle factions, to exhort the people to lead a Christian life, and to re-awaken those ancient virtues of the Sienese, for unfortunately the Pagan spirit of the Renaissance had greatly corrupted the ancient city.

Then again within the walls of Siena those terrible prophecies were heard, prophecies which remind us of the stern Hebrew prophets of old. The old man went in and out of the narrow streets admonishing the people and shouting in a loud voice. "Siena, be converted or thou wilt be destroyed. Siena, unwind the skein, for the end of the string has been lost, and it will have to be cut. Siena, soon will come one that will ruin thee. Thou preparest the tart and another will enjoy it. Siena, a great flood will submerge thee, and thou shalt see thy squares occupied by the 'vivandieri,' thy chapels dormitories for thieves, thy public fountains drinking troughs and horse ponds, and the clubs of thy nobles stables for cavalry."

While the terrible cries of the people were heard in the narrow streets of the city during the siege, Brandano could be seen like a fatal spectre going up and down to serve the poor. He continually risked his life, entering into the enemy's camp to buy bread and gather mallows and roots for food for all those who, being considered

useless, had been driven out of the city and now languished under the walls. Their condition must have been a scene of horror, according to Montluc: "I have never seen, and hope I never shall see again such distress and desolation. There were over 4400 of these poor miserable creatures. And the master had to leave his servant who had served him for years, the mistress her maid, and multitudes had to leave the city where they had worked for their daily bread, and this desolation and weeping lasted for three days.

"These poor creatures tried to cross the enemy's line, but the whole camp remained under arms day and night to keep a watch on them and push them back to the walls, hoping that, being desperate, they would enter the city and eat up the last bits of bread, and that those inside, seeing their misery, would surrender. But this did not take place, and another eight days passed. Their only food was herbs, and more than half of them died. Many of them were killed by the enemy and very few escaped. There were many lovely women and girls who had free passes, and many of them were taken possession of by the Spaniards, but the Marquis did not know this. A few strong men escaped during the night, but only about a fourth of the number, the others died. These were the necessities of war, for we have to be cruel to conquer the enemy.

"God must be very merciful to us men of war, for we do so much evil."

The year previous to this siege, Brandano had said to some peasants who were digging a ditch: "Make it very deep and wide, for it will have to be filled with the dead."

Now all that remained for him to do was to weep over his prophecy. Death overtook Brandano, the prophet of heavenly vengeance, when in the midst of his charitable

work, sparing him the humiliation of witnessing the fall of the country of which he was a living symbol of love and faith. He died on May 14th, 1554.

. . . . . .

Siena, the city of Saints, the cradle of mysticism, the seat of learning, the lovely town made famous in art, legend, history and poetry, capitulated April 1555, nearly a year after the poor "Fool of Christ" had entered on his rest.

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